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The Big Society and Education Policy A Conceptual Analysis

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The Big Society and Education Policy: a conceptual analysis

Volume 1 of 1

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Education

University of Bath

Department of Education

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents	2
Abstract	5
Introduction	6
Chapter 1: The Big Society	9
Introduction	9
Education Policy 2010-2014	10
Ideological background to the Big Society	12
<i>Understanding community and civil society</i>	12
<i>Localism</i>	14
<i>The Localism Bill 2012</i>	15
Models of Community	17
<i>The Christian church – a faith model of community</i>	18
<i>The Co-operative movement</i>	19
<i>Saul Alinsky People’s Organisations</i>	20
<i>Putnam: community as social capital</i>	22
Political communitarianism and civil society	25
<i>Keane: civil society: the context for community participation and action</i>	26
Big Society an answer to Broken Britain?	27
Capitalism and Community	34
Chapter 2: Intellectual antecedents	37
<i>What are the intellectual antecedents, if any?</i>	37
Phillip Blond: Red Toryism and philosophical / theological thought	37
<i>Detaching social conservatism from neoliberal economics</i>	38
<i>Demarking concern for the poor from class struggle</i>	42
<i>Promoting localism</i>	44
<i>Establishing a clear role for elites in social management</i>	47
Blond and Liberalism	50
Radical Orthodoxy and John Milbank	56
Hierarchies, liberalism and civil democracy	60
Disraeli and Nineteenth century political thought	63
Hayek, Oakeshott and Liberal Conservatism	65
The role of the State	69
<i>Intellectual debt to Burke</i>	69
Eclectic nature of Conservatism	72
<i>Capitalism</i>	73

Chapter 3: English Education policy	75
In defence of liberal education	78
<i>Education as conversation</i>	81
<i>Universities: learning to live or learning to work</i>	82
<i>Exclusivity, elitism or equality of opportunity?</i>	83
<i>The role of the state - intervention, standards and assessment</i>	84
Coalition Education Policy 2010-2014	86
<i>The teaching profession</i>	87
<i>Recruitment and Quality</i>	87
<i>Initial teacher training and CPD</i>	89
<i>The state system of schooling</i>	89
<i>Historical background</i>	90
<i>Chains and federations</i>	91
<i>Powers of the Secretary of State</i>	92
<i>The Curriculum</i>	93
Analysis of reforms	94
<i>Conceptualising pedagogy</i>	94
<i>UK emphasis on curriculum - pedagogy subsidiary to curriculum</i>	95
<i>Learning</i>	97
<i>Teaching</i>	98
<i>Curriculum</i>	101
<i>What constitutes knowledge in the new national curriculum?</i>	102
Summary	104
<i>Coalition education policy and the Big Society</i>	104
<i>Freedom from or freedom to?</i>	104
<i>Responsibility and fairness</i>	105
 Chapter 4: Reflections on Policy in Relation to the Big Society	 107
Introduction	107
Policy as Bricolage	108
<i>A retrospective: the miscellany of conservative Thought</i>	109
<i>Reflection: historical experience</i>	110
<i>Projection: possibilities and potential</i>	110
<i>Generalisation: creating the new</i>	111
<i>Limitations</i>	113
Policy and the Power of Ideas	115
<i>The 'economist-centred' model</i>	115
<i>The 'state-centred' approach</i>	116
<i>The 'coalition-centred' approach</i>	117
Vidovich's 'hybridised model'	118
<i>We are all neoliberals now</i>	119
<i>Markets</i>	120
<i>Markets and Trust</i>	122
<i>Markets and morality</i>	123

<i>Sandel's theory of crowding out</i>	124
<i>Markets and externalities</i>	125
So at what point is 'the state where necessary'?	126
<i>The Big Society: part of the answer or part of the problem?</i>	126
<i>Imperfect competition</i>	126
<i>Inadequate information</i>	127
<i>Externalities</i>	128
<i>Public Goods. State monopoly vs quasi-markets</i>	129
Summary	132
<i>The Big Society and the problem of political neoliberalism</i>	132
 Chapter 5: Conclusion	 134
 Reference List	 136

Abstract

This thesis begins by exploring the notion of 'The Big Society' promoted by David Cameron at the time of the UK general election in May 2010 and arguably one of the most significant ideological themes to have emerged from the British Conservative Party in recent years. This conceptual analysis then explores the intellectual antecedents which inform Big Society ideology, arguing that the eclectic nature of Conservative Party thinking draws on liberal, conservative, radical and socialist models of community, civil society and the role of the state in relation to these. Theoretical models such as Lévi Strauss's (1962) model of *bricolage*, Hall's (1998) agency of political ideas and Vidovich's (2007) 'hybridised model' help uncover the contradictions and limitations in Big Society policy-making and implementation. The thesis argues that there is a distinct silence in relation to the role of capitalism, either in the historical narratives or its place in the new political order that makes up the Big Society.

Absent also, is any clear notion of the role and contribution of education in this context. Analysis of Secretary of State Michael Gove's education policy 2010-2014, demonstrates that an education system constructed on notions of freedom, responsibility and fairness may have radically changed the education landscape in England but has ultimately failed to stem the tide of neo-liberal hegemony, the effects of which the Big Society attempted to ameliorate.

The Big Society and Education Policy: a conceptual analysis

Introduction

In an article about the current phase in education policy post 1997, Stephen Ball (2012, p.89) argues that English Education policy under New Labour and the Conservative led coalition government has come full circle from the first constitution of a state system of education in the 1870s to the 'beginning of the end' of that state system in 2010. In doing so he identifies a parallel between the '*first liberalism*' of the early to mid-nineteenth century, and the '*second liberalism*', neo-liberalism of the late twentieth–early twenty-first century (*ibid*). The argument is constructed around notions of 'the reluctant State' or as Crouch (2013) puts it, the balance between 'the market where possible' and 'the state where necessary'. Both political parties were essentially looking to devolve, or as Ball (2012) argues '*deconcentrate*' power and responsibility for the delivery of state services from the centre to local public, private and voluntary institutions and organisations. What has emerged, then, is a new mix of 'hierarchy, heterarchy and market' which (may) herald a return to the 'messy, patchy and diverse 'system' of education' that existed at the time of the 'first liberalism' (Ball, 2012, p.100). The logical progression and continuity of education policy reforms across the party-political divide is significant. Not only does this focus attention on the role of the State as facilitator or coordinator of the education policy landscape, but it also calls for a different rhetoric and policy discourse on the part of each political party in power so as to distinguish one form of governance from the other. Where New Labour couched public service reforms including education (initially at least) in terms of the 'Third Way', David Cameron, leader of the coalition, promoted a more 'compassionate Conservatism' under the banner of a Big Society.

'a society with much higher levels of personal, professional, civic and corporate responsibility; a society where people come together to solve problems and improve life for themselves and their communities; a society where the leading force for progress is social responsibility, not state control (Conservative Party Manifesto 2010).

It is the construction and outworking of the ideology of the Big Society that forms the focus of this thesis.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis addresses the question how far English education policy 2010-2014 encapsulates the aims and purposes of the Big Society.

Chapter 1 sets out to explore what is understood by the Big Society and how this articulates with Conservative/Liberal Democrat education policy following the general election in the UK in 2010. Big Society was meant to represent the antithesis of Big Government and signal a step change from the centralising effects of New Labour policy-making, particularly in terms of education and social care. Yet in a continuation of New Labour policy in opening up the delivery of public services to private sector operators, the Big Society calls for an active and participatory society that will benefit both personally and collectively from engagement with local community needs.

Sections of the thesis on the ideological background to Big Society thinking focus on notions of community and civil society. This is done by first explaining localism and the Localism Act (HMG 2011c), central to the coalition public service reform. Next models of community are considered, from early biblical principles that have influenced proponents of the Big Society such as Phillip Blond and John Milbank, to Robert Putnam's concept of community as social capital. Work by Etzioni and Saul Alinsky also contribute to Big Society thinking in relation to active civil societies and communitarianism. It is against this background that the Big Society is constructed as an answer to the perceived faults of civil society, which are supposedly the causes of a now 'Broken Britain'. In the final section of this chapter, the influence of capitalism on community is discussed in the light of work by Hirschman and Polyani.

Chapter 2 looks beyond these recognisable strands in political thinking to the underlying theoretical antecedents of the Big Society. It traces both Conservative and Liberal thought through the writings of one of the key exponents of the Big Society, Phillip Blond. In his construction of what he calls 'Red Toryism' (Blond

2010), Blond asserts the merits of conservatism over a liberalism which he considers has contributed to what he perceives as the social and political malaise of contemporary Britain. His arguments have roots in the political theology of John Milbank's 'radical orthodoxy' and the writings of Edmund Burke and Benjamin Disraeli. Blond's economic arguments find parallels in the German Mittlestand and Foucault offers a useful critique of his particular understanding of capitalism and neoliberal economics. The chapter ends with an attempt to trace the evidence of liberal thought in both conservative and liberal discourse with reference to Hayek - a conservative who declared himself a liberal and Oakeshott - a liberal who declared himself conservative.

Having established the political and intellectual antecedents of the Big Society in Chapter 2 and demonstrated the eclectic nature of conservative intellectual thought about understandings of community, civil society and the role of the state, Chapter 3 sets out the education policy of Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education 2010-2014 using the liberal/conservative insights of Oakeshott referred to in the previous chapter.

Finally, Chapter 4 offers some reflections on policy making in relation to the Big Society. Central to this discussion is the limited purchase the notion of the Big Society has had, either with politicians or with the general public. The chapter explores the limits and possibilities of a Big Society using two complementary heuristics: first, that of Levi-Strauss's (1962) notion of *bricolage* and second, Hall's (1988) notion of the agency of political ideas.

Chapter 1: The Big Society

Introduction

Keep a close eye, not on what the Coalition says, but on what it does or doesn't do' (Benn 2010, p.285).

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the origins of the concept of the Big Society and to consider how far current education policy, including the Academies and Free Schools agenda, represents the Big Society in practice. This entails examining understandings of 'community' from early biblical principles that have inspired thinkers such as Phillip Blond and John Milbank, to radical expressions of community empowerment in the twentieth century such as those expounded by Saul Alinsky. The underlying question is how far the positioning of the Big Society is in response to, or undermined by, modern day capitalism, where the writings of Hirschmann, in articulating rival views of capital society, are particularly helpful.

The Big Society is defined as much by what it is not, as by what it is. It is not, for example, a new concept but draws extensively on a wealth of traditions and ideas about strengthening communities, civic action, and co-ownership of public services that have developed over time. The House of Commons, Public Administration Select Committee (PASC 2011) identified a number of links with political and philosophical thought including Edmund Burke's notion of the 'little platoons' to which we belong in society: 'the first principle...of public affections'. Connections were also made with the Christian vision of society, the collegiate activity of the Co-operative movement, and the left-wing American radical, Saul Alinsky. Added to this there are roots in Putnam's (1995) discourse on social capital, Etzioni's view of communitarianism, notions of people power and social entrepreneurship which are also noted (PASC 2011). These ideas point to a redistribution of state power, shifting from the centre, to localities and communities at the periphery. According to the Select Committee, this necessitates a change in the role of the institutions of government at both national and local level, together with a re-conceptualisation of the rights and

responsibilities individuals and non-government organisations have in their relationship to the state.

Vernon suggests that phrases such as the 'great society', coined variously by President Johnson, Walter Lipmann, Graham Wallace and F.A. Hayek, depend for their popular appeal on transforming the complex into the epigrammatic and displacing attention from what is problematic to what is persuasive (Vernon 1976, p.261). In so doing attention is distracted away from precisely what is at issue. This is no less true of the idiomatic expression "Big Society." For David Cameron, Prime Minister and leader of the Conservative party, 'Big Society' represents the antithesis of 'big government' demonstrable, it seems, by a move from 'state action to social action' (Cameron 2009). At its heart, it appears, is the desire to promote social action for the benefits of community empowerment. The emphasis is on facilitating a renaissance of local, rather than state institutions in the determination of policy at community level. The approach, according to government rhetoric, is two-fold: first, by making opportunity more equal, primarily through educational reforms and second, by actively making a stronger and more responsible society. However, the appeal of a 'Big Society' obfuscates the real issues at hand. It raises a number of significant questions about the purpose and organisation of a state system of education, about what is understood by community and the function of civil society and, finally, about the role of the state in a post welfare society.

Education Policy 2010-2014

Education policy became centre-stage following the 2010 election and the formation of the Coalition Government. Government concern centred on England's purported descending trajectory in international league tables, indicating for the Conservatives all that was wrong with the state system of education under thirteen years of New Labour and signalling a crisis for England's economic competitiveness on the world stage. The state was too invasive, binding schools with overbearing bureaucracy which limited teacher professionalism and the freedom to maintain discipline (c.f. Gove 2010a). The National Curriculum and attendant qualifications were no longer fit for the

purpose of creating 'superb' state schools (Gove 2009). What was called for was greater autonomy for schools and teachers: freedom to convert to Academy status, freedom to set up new 'Free' Schools, freedom to exert discipline. This was to be underpinned by improving the quality of teaching, reforming the examination system, the National Curriculum and vocational training and, finally, through 'closing the gap' between rich and poor.

This rhetoric was to find purchase in the Coalition's Conservative dominated education policy, enshrined in the Education Act (HMG 2011a). It is of note that this act was the first major piece of education legislation enacted by the new government, an indication of the significance of education to their overall policy agenda. Its remit was sweeping, making fundamental changes to the state provision of schooling and Higher Education (HE), and bears close association with the Conservative proposals for education outlined whilst in opposition. The Opportunity Agenda (Conservative Party 2007) held the state schools system responsible for the inequalities in society because it failed to give poor children a fair chance and was hounded by over-centralisation in terms of decision-making processes, archaic admissions policies and an inability to respond to parental demands for new schools. In an age marked by greater ownership of information by ordinary people, the assertion was that these issues can be addressed by replacing state power with people power and bureaucracy with democracy. The proposed new approach purported to be based on trust and a belief that people will do the right thing (*ibid*). Devolving power and control allows for better decisions than the state can make on an individual's behalf, signifying the Conservative's rationale for involving families, businesses, communities and the 'myriad of institutions of civil society' in schooling, one of seven key areas requiring reform that include housing, skills, pensions, and enterprise. Transferring power from the state to the citizen is presented as the natural progression of the democratic process and a belief in empowerment through shared information choice. The school systems of Sweden, where money is said to follow the individual pupil, and that of the Netherlands, where a quorum of parents can set up a new school to meet local demand, provide examples of systems that offer high educational standards supported by an active citizenry.

However, the 2011 Education Act (HMG 2011a) appeared to centralise rather than devolve government power. Apart from extending the duty of local authorities to provide fifteen hours of free childcare to parents of two year-olds identified as disadvantaged and granting new disciplinary powers to school staff and head teachers in relation to searching or excluding pupils, the powers of the Secretary of State were increased. The General Teaching Council for England (GTCE), the Teaching and Development Agency (TDA), the Young People's Learning Agency for England (YPLA) and the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) were all disbanded under the Act and their powers reverted to the Secretary of State. The Act also conferred additional powers on the Secretary of State in relation to setting up new schools or imposing Academy status on schools rated by Ofsted as requiring improvement. In this regard, a number of additions and amendments were made to the Academies Act of 2010 (HMG 2010a) and student tuition fees for HE increased to a maximum of £9,000 per annum. However, these policy changes do articulate with the notion of a 'Big Society' in two specific ways. First, the Academies and Free Schools agenda widens the diversity of the state schooling system and transfers the delivery of state education into the hands of private companies, charitable organisations and philanthropies, theoretically enhancing community engagement and accountability. Second, the aims of the reforms stress a social mobility /equality agenda with a focus on 'raising the bar and closing the gap' in terms of teacher training, pupil behaviour, curriculum and the offer of a pupil premium. But the questions remained as to how these ideas of enhanced community involvement, social mobility and a small state might be used in the conceptualisation of the notion of a big society.

Ideological background to the Big Society

Understanding community and civil society

The antecedents of the 'Big Society', by and large, have a long history and have been used variously in establishing a rationale for Conservative Party and later Coalition Government approaches to public sector and social welfare reform. What is common amongst them is an appeal to a former, 'golden' age of familial

and social networks of associations: the natural conduits of a moral code and set of values that permitted the flourishing of individual and social well-being. To this end, 'community' features strongly as an organising tool in public policy discourse, particularly since the late 1960s and the waning of the post-war age of political consensus which had consequences for constructs of community based on spatial or identity boundaries. The Labour government of 1945 was faced with a number of interlinked problems including housing, transport, and urban renewal, which involved the disruption and upheaval of certain communities (Hoggett 1997). It is out of this context that two specific political discourses of community have emerged.

On the one hand, there is acknowledgement of the positive benefits of grass-roots community action. In the 1970s, priority was given to strategies of conflict, rather than participation, in order to effect local reform (*ibid*, p.9). In this respect, some local authorities sought to facilitate the development of oppositional communities through radical decentralisation initiatives, concentrating support on new community alliances around identities such as race or gender, as opposed to class. On the other hand, the state also looked to strategies of incorporation, encouraging participatory action in centrally funded initiatives, as a means of sustaining administrative stability and subduing 'troublesome elements' (*ibid*, p.9) witnessed, for example, during the race riots of the 1980s in urban areas of England. Community groups, therefore, became embroiled in the competitive battle for scarce government resources in order to fulfil their aims. This was, inevitably, to have a deleterious effect on any sense of community, exacerbating existing tensions between diverse social groups. What was occurring between community groups and providers was also mirrored on a larger scale, in that cities and regions were set in competition with one another in a global market. Community has also become synonymous with the absence, or withdrawal, of state services, promoted in the first instance as a local authority strategy of community governance. This became central to New Labour's approach to localism via New Public Management. Thus, in Hoggett's (1997) analysis, the problem of community represents either the dysfunctional outcome of social and economic policy (system dysfunction) or dysfunctional families and social networks, social instability and a threat to the existing order (social pathologies).

Community also represents an imaginary safety net, or a form of social capital, to be enlisted in the competitive struggle for survival or an essential element of emancipatory politics, a resource of resistance based on identities or a lost ideal of society (*ibid*, p.11). These perceptions of community are persistent and evidenced in Big Society discourse. The idea of community as the nexus of rights and obligations is firmly embedded here.

Localism

Superficially, localism is about government devolving powers to local communities and institutions such as schools. According to Giddens (2002 cited in Olssen *et al.* 2004, p. 211) localism is the 'freedom to do things differently', offering flexibility and opportunities for innovation. It is more inclusive of people in the democratic process and encourages democratic citizenship. Whereas centralism generates inefficiency and bureaucracy, localism produces greater competence in the management of public services. However, in Olssen *et al.*'s (*ibid*, p.212) analysis of this notion of localism, local community groups and institutions are unequal in power and influence, yet equality, professional standards, expertise and justice all require uniformity in both provision and enforcement. Localism celebrates difference and diversity, but challenges fairness and equality, a tension being played out through the Academies and Free Schools agenda. The state's role is one of facilitating and coordinating, whilst allowing institutions such as schools to make their own decisions. In reality, the state still effects control: power is merely reorganised via networks and partnerships rather than reduced, and may even be increased, in attempts to iron out the inequalities in power relationships within and between local authorities and partners (*ibid*, p.212-3). Therefore, the role of localism in the support and furthering of democratic processes does not, of itself, produce a shift in real power.

Localism is predicated on certain understandings of community. 'Community' is a word with varied interpretations. The term is variously used for fellowship, joint ownership, a state or organised society, a common identity, or interests, for example legal, scientific, academic, religious or business communities (Yudice

2005, p.51). As such, 'community' often implies a connection such as kinship, faith, cultural heritage, or shared values and goals, in other words something that is deeper than a mere contractual association of individuals such as the market or the state. 'Community', thus, can refer to the geographical and physical, or groups bound by common interest. Smith (2001), for example, uses concepts such as 'place' (locality), 'interest' (non-place forms of community) and 'communion' (a spirit of communion) to identify different, even conflicting, notions of community. Since the mid-1980s, the discourse of community has been used to legitimate conservative private assistance and self-help projects as well as liberal public-private partnerships that empower communities to govern or police themselves (*ibid*, p.53). To this end, according to Yudice, there has been a number of administrative initiatives including community policing, community care, community centres, and community arts. Such initiatives assume an ability to facilitate community interaction.

The fact that people may live in close proximity to one another does not of itself create a community; rather it is the social networks that exist between individuals, their friends, families, colleagues and associates that bind people together (Lee and Newby 1983; Held 2006). 'Community' is a 'warmly persuasive word' (Williams 1976, p.76) and as such, has become a powerful organising tool in political discourse serving to define who is 'excluded' as well as who is 'included'. Community, for example, served as a core constituent of New Labour's social policy, demonstrated through the promotion of 'community empowerment' via New Public Management. Communities were to take responsibility for their own circumstances. Whilst government would provide the opportunities and systems that would facilitate change, local communities were to take ownership of the policies and services that could make this possible. Furthermore, discourse on community under New Labour, became a means of countering individualist theory and culture arising from neoliberalism.

The Localism Bill 2012

In its analysis of the Big Society, the House of Commons Select Committee on Public Administration (PASC 2011) argues that a coherent policy agenda across

government is lacking and, in the absence of such a coherent plan, the Government so far has been unable to communicate effectively what the Big Society means in terms of practical policies. Scrutiny of coalition policy during their first term of office, however, may suggest otherwise. If communicating the Big Society has proved difficult, the measure of it is indeed detectable in current policy making, particularly in the passing of the Education Act, (HMG 2011a), the Localism Act (HMG 2011c) and The Opening Public Services White Paper (HMG 2011b).

In England, the Localism Act (HMG 2011c) offers a legal framework for the Big Society project in demonstrating the intentional shift from state governing to governance. The aim is to devolve greater powers to councils and neighbourhoods, and give local communities more control over housing and planning decisions. There is the potential for greater community involvement in decision-making via referenda called for by the local authority or local residents, including the election of local mayors in certain authorities, and the ability of local community and voluntary groups to challenge service provision. Local authorities receive greater flexibility in relation to social housing, local business rate relief and the protection of services and facilities threatened by closure. In essence, the powers of the local authority are extended to include 'anything that individuals generally may do', as long as that is not limited by some other Act. For some, the changes contained within the Act hold potential for the further devolution of powers from central government. The Localism Bill promised the transfer of a range of powers, currently held with civil servants in Whitehall, to eight 'core English cities' including Manchester and Birmingham, with some in Cornwall wishing for a devolution of power to a Cornish Assembly (Western Morning News 2011).

The intended outworking of the Big Society is contained in the Open Public Services White Paper (HMG 2011b). Organised around five 'key principles': choice, decentralisation, diversity, fairness and accountability the objective of divesting the public sector of its responsibility for service provision and transferring this to other organisations in the private and third sectors is clear. These key principles resonate with the political concepts and models discussed

earlier, such as Blond's 'politics of virtue.' However, it is argued that merely shifting responsibility for the delivery of one-time public services out of the hands of the state does not necessarily mean greater efficiency or the promotion of equity promised by adherents to the principles of Big Society. Lord Adebawale (2010), for example, warns of the US experience that indicated volunteerism alone could not provide reliable, dependable public services. Nor can it be assumed that all charitable organisations are necessarily either capable or want to deliver public services, or indeed that all public services are suitable for third sector delivery. There will be an impact on the charitable sector, in terms of how it operates, becoming in essence an agent of public policy. The House of Commons Select Committee Report warned against the potential of the Big Society agenda to compromise the independence of the sector with a subsequent loss in the activist nature of some of these organisations. There is also the issue of how charitable and voluntary groups compete for and work with the private sector in the delivery of services and how commissioning bids are to be managed. This process has had deleterious effects on many charities both through an increased demand for their services, through competition from private enterprise, often in receipt of government funding and through the transfer of risk from the state to providers (Charities Evaluation Services, n.d.). Overall 'open public services' raises important questions about the underlying assumptions driving the localism agenda, and the impact this has on the balance of power between government and service providers and between different sectors involved in service provision. These questions of power also relate to citizenship and democracy. Opening public services to a range of new providers with greater local determination of provision, suggests local variations in services and raises important issues of equity, choice, accountability and representation.

Models of Community

A number of models of community were indicated in the House of Commons Select Committee on Public Administration (PASC 2011) which suggest how community in the Big Society is envisioned and throws some light on the rationale for community enlistment into the project.

The Christian church – a faith model of community

Biblical understandings of community are at their most developed in the pages of the New Testament through the descriptions and teachings of the early Christian church. At one level, the church consists of a number of diverse local congregations, each with their own constitutional structure and officers. Yet, at a deeper level, all these communities are part of one universal church united to Christ, as the body is to the head [Col. 1:18; Col. 1: 24; Eph. 4:15; Eph. 5:23] or as branches are to a vine [Jn. 15: 5] (Holy Bible New International Version 2011). Thus, the church represents a special, distinctive grouping: inheritors of the promises of God, and brought into being by Him. Membership of this spiritual community (the church universal) is voluntary, and depends on a personal acceptance of the authority of Christ over a believer's life. Membership of the empirical church, the 'local congregation', is accredited through a public profession of faith (baptism - and/or confirmation depending on denomination) and, particularly in non-conformist churches, by approval of the church officers and election into full membership. Church membership is dual focused. Members have responsibility both to the local congregation and the community of believers worldwide. They also seek to serve the local community and the community of non-believers worldwide.

The outworking of this commitment is demonstrated by two specific concepts, brotherly love or *philadelphia* and *koinonia* or fellowship. The activities of service and worship in the communal life of the church are summarised in the Greek *koinonia*, variously translated as fellowship, community, communion, partnership and sharing. Expressions of brotherly love (*philadelphia*) involve a common way of thinking and living, especially in terms of practical hospitality and in supporting the needy. By definition, *philadelphia* cannot be realised outside the community of faith (Elingworth 1980, p.210); however, there is strength and security in holding certain values and ways of life in common, which allow for the sharing of common experiences today and offer a cultural template for tomorrow.

Down the centuries, the church has exercised a powerful influence in matters of government as an institution of state, forming the basis of English law, social

values, and morals. Industrial productivity during the nineteenth century was underpinned by the Protestant work ethic, and prior to 1870, much of the Britain's network of schools had been established by the church. Non-conformists made a considerable contribution to the delivery of welfare services through charitable and philanthropic organisations and set examples of alternative models of housing and employment standards for the workforce as in the case of Cadbury's Bourneville, Lever Brothers' Port Sunlight, and Robert Owen's New Lanark Mills, in response to some of the worst excesses of the industrial revolution.

The Co-operative movement

Shared goals and a practical commitment to fellow man are also hallmarks of other expressions of community. The Co-operative movement with its origins in the nineteenth century is one such example. Again, set against the backdrop of the industrial revolution and rapid changes in society through mechanisation, the Co-operative movement, alongside other labour and social movements of the day, sought to address the welfare issues of the working classes, many of whom were forced to live and work in poverty in the growing industrial towns. Robert Owen, for example, opened a co-operative store at the New Lanark Mills. But it was the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers, established in 1844, who consolidated previous co-operative efforts by formulating the Rochdale Principles. These included the distribution of a share of the profits according to purchases known as the 'dividend'. The Industrial and Provident Societies Act of 1862 gave co-operatives a corporate status and legal framework. By 1863 the Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS) had been established and in subsequent years the co-operative movement had branched out into manufacturing, insurance, banking and education. The Rochdale Principles were formally adopted by the International Co-operative Alliance in 1937 and have since been updated. By 1995 they were to form part of the Statement of Co-operative Identity.

Co-operative values and principles are underpinned by a strong sense of democracy and mutual support. Co-operative values are listed as self-help, self-

responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity (Co-operative Group, n.d.). Ethical values are also listed. These are openness, honesty, social responsibility, and caring for others (*ibid*). Membership is voluntary and open to all who share these values, evidenced through working together for the benefit of all members and taking an active role in the community. The principles are the means by which co-operatives put their values into action: voluntary and open membership, democratic member control, member economic participation, autonomy and independence, education, training and information, co-operation amongst co-operatives and finally a concern for the community (*ibid*). Strength to effect change lies in the social bonds and clearly defined collective values of organisations.

Saul Alinsky People's Organisations

What is evident from these examples is that the very notion of community can be viewed as a value (Frazer 1999, p.76) drawing together elements such as solidarity, commitment, mutuality and trust – similar components to the Christian notion of fellowship, *koinonia*. For Saul Alinsky there is power to be unleashed to effect positive change even in the most alienated and disaffected communities. The dynamics of power and the interaction between those who are denied resources, and those who deny them, is of key interest (Seal 2008). Much of Alinsky's work had to do with organising disadvantaged, alienated, and disparate communities to take control of their own circumstances and become effective agents for change. Working in the slum areas of Chicago he set up the Back-of-the-yards Neighbourhood Council, identifying common interests that brought previously hostile ethnic and religious groups together. This model was extended to other declining urban neighbourhoods through the Industrial Areas Foundation. *Reveille for Radicals* (1946) outlines the principles and practice of community organising (demonstrated by Alinsky in the setting up of Peoples' Organisations), the unifying of ordinary citizens around immediate grievances, and establishing alternative, effective ways of expressing dissent. Both action and direction has to come from the practical concerns of the masses (Alinsky 1972).

‘As an organizer I start from where the world is, as it is, not as I would like it to be. That we accept the world as it is does not in any sense weaken our desire to change it into what we believe it should be – it is necessary to begin where the world is if we are going to change it to what we think it should be. That means working in the system (*ibid*, p.xix).

Communities have the potential for changing the system. That communities should be active in the real issues that concern them is the key to both radicalism and democracy (Seal 2008). According to Alinsky, the American radical is one who believes in what he says, holds the common good as the greatest personal value, believes in and wholly identifies with mankind, and is concerned with the fundamental causes, rather than the manifestations of, the issues concerned. The aim of the radical is a world where the worth of the individual is recognised, a society where man’s potentialities could be realised and where man lives in dignity, security, happiness, and peace. In other words a world based on the morality of humankind (*ibid*). Human rights are placed above property rights and free, public education is fundamental to the democratic way of life.

In Alinsky’s view, people naturally live together in communities. In a democratic society, they express their views and dictates through their own organisations; those organisations in which people naturally participate and which they own. The power of the people is transmitted through these organisations and democracy moves forward (Alinsky 1972, p.46). These organisations are genuinely ‘of the people, by the people, and for the people’, and by their very nature, they formulate and articulate a democratic philosophy. This would not be possible if people did not come together, therefore, the existence of organisations is fundamental to the functioning of democracy (*ibid*, p.47). A strong and active civil society is essential to the building and consolidation of democracy.

Furthermore, popular education is the objective for which any Peoples’ Organisation must strive. Community is not a classroom; therefore, Peoples’

Organisations must create the conditions and climate in which people want to learn, maintaining dignity and self-respect in all people (*ibid*, p.164). Peoples' Organisations encourage the acquisition of knowledge and the consequent changing of attitudes through the constant exchange of views and sharing common experiences. The result is a mutual understanding and a new appreciation and definition of social issues (*ibid*, p.155). Successful outcomes are therefore more likely in civically engaged communities because of the social connections established through networks and organisations.

Yet these radical ideas are far removed from the Conservative construct of 'Big Society' which has more to do with handing over elements of state power to certain approved groups or communities, rather than having it wrested from them by the disaffected.

Putnam: community as social capital

The common framework that underpins the examples of community so far presented is what Robert Putnam describes as 'social capital', those features of social organisation such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefits (Putnam 1995, p.67). Putnam discounts declinist or declentionist analyses of civil society, recognising that over time there have been both ups and downs in civic engagement. Life is easier in a society blessed with a substantial stock of social capital. Networks of civic engagement foster strong norms of generalised reciprocity and encourage social trust. Such networks facilitate co-ordination and communication, amplify reputations, and thus allow dilemmas of collective action to be resolved. In this way, social capital is closely related to civic virtue which is at its most powerful when embedded in dense networks of reciprocal social relations. Furthermore, when economic and political negotiation is embedded in networks of social action, (as with Alinsky's Peoples' Organisations) the incentives for opportunism are reduced. In this way, social connections and civic engagement pervasively influence public life and private prospects (*ibid*).

The term social capital is not new to Putnam but as he claims (Putnam 2000, p.19) has been 'invented' a number of times during the twentieth century from Hanifan in 1916 to Bourdieu and James Coleman in the 1980s. Social capital is simultaneously both a private and a public good. Social connections are important for the rules of conduct they sustain in that human networks involve mutual obligations that foster sturdy norms of reciprocity. At times this reciprocity can be specific – 'I will do this for you if you will do that for me'. What is more valuable is when reciprocity is more generalised – 'I will do this for you without expecting an immediate return but confident that in the future someone else will do something for me' – in other words a belief in the common maxim, what goes around comes around. A society that is characterised by generalised reciprocity is more efficient, according to Putnam, than a distrustful society. Indeed, it is the quality of trustworthiness that lubricates social life. Thus, civil engagement and social capital entail mutual obligation and personal responsibility for actions.

In this way, community is recognised as the 'conceptual cousin' (*ibid*, p. 21) of social capital, yet Putnam warns that community, although usually conceived as something warm and comfortable, is not always so. Networks and associated social norms of reciprocity may well be good for those inside the network but the external effects are not always positive. Putnam offers 'nimby-ism' (not in my back yard) as an example here. Plans for a young offenders institution or the building of a wind farm may be rigorously opposed by those who aim to achieve 'ends that are antisocial from a wider perspective' (*ibid*, p.22). In other words, social capital can be directed towards malevolent, antisocial purposes, just like any other form of capital. Association, a fundamental principle of social capital, therefore, does not necessarily generate social cohesion. Narrowly self-interested groups can generate trust internally but not necessarily from the outside. The Mafia would be an example here. Thus the aim is to maximise the positive consequences of social capital whilst minimising the negative manifestations thereof. To this end Putnam is able to identify different forms of social capital from that which emerges from repeated, intensive, multi-stranded networks, through to networks convened for both private and public ends. Networks, therefore, can be either inward or outward looking or both; inclusive or bridging in their aspect, or exclusive or bonding. This distinction for Putnam is of

particular import. Bonding social capital is good for undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilising solidarity, whereas bridging is better for linkage to external assets and information. An example in the UK would be Children's Centres in that they not only created networks for young mothers but also aimed to link them into sources of information and support networks. It is these weak ties to distant acquaintances, who move in different social, political or intellectual circles, which are more valuable in the production of social capital, than the strong ties established with close family and friends. Bridging social capital therefore generates broader identities and reciprocity, but bridging and bonding groups should not be seen as an either or alternative, but understood as part of a continuum of more or less.

In short, Putnam posits that there is a correlation between social trust and associational membership. The greater the density of the latter, the more trusting are its citizens. In this way, trust and engagement represent two facets of the same phenomenon. Social capital, therefore, represents all that is positive in human networks, the most fundamental of which are the family and neighbourly connections. For Putnam, the benefits accrued through social capital operate at the level both of the individual and the community and thus the notion of social capital has strong associations with the ideas of communitarianism. But critics of Putnam's iteration of social capital would beg to differ. Green et.al. (2009, p.20) question the relationship between social capital and social solidarity. Although the analysis of both may use similar indicators such as trust, the phenomena bear little relationship to each other. Social capital may reside in different people groups but this will not necessarily make for social cohesion in that intra-group bonding does not necessarily translate into inter-group harmony. Only specific types of social capital such as Putnam's 'bridging' or 'linking' capital may contribute to a state of social cohesion. However, as with social capital, social cohesion can take various forms, each of which consists of different configurations of social characteristics.

Where Putnam's social capital characteristics such as trust, tolerance and association may work positively together at the level of the individual, this is seldom evidenced at a national level. Green *et.al.* (*ibid*, p.21) identify three,

distinctive types of discourse concerning social cohesion emerging from western academic thought, broadly defined as: liberal, republican and social democratic. It is the liberal discourse that fits most closely with the Cameron's Big Society ideal. This places an emphasis on an active civil society, particularly at local level. The role of the central state and its institutional roles for providing welfare and social protection, and promoting equality through redistribution, are played down. The core values that bind society, in addition to trust, are meritocracy and opportunity. Thus, both Putnam and Green *et.al.* raise questions about the role of the citizen, both as individual and as a member of the community, in the model Big Society. Is social capital regarded as the sociological basis for the Big Society, and if so, what might be preventing this from happening? This will be discussed in the first instance with reference to political communitarianism and civil society.

Political communitarianism and civil society

What is of relevance to the development of Cameron's Big Society is the notion advanced by Etzioni, of political communitarianism. The community, as we have explored in the models so far described, is central: 'Communitarians, [are] people committed to creating a new moral, social, and public order based on restored communities, without puritanism or oppression' (Etzioni 1995, p.2). Drawing on a declinist philosophy, political communitarianism asserts that law and order can be restored, the family can be saved, schools can provide essential moral education, and people can live in communities with an attendant increase in social responsibilities. Furthermore, commitment to self-interest can be balanced by commitment to the community and powerful self-interest groups in government can be curbed (*ibid*). In essence, political communitarianism is a rights and responsibilities approach to community action and democratic engagement. Community here represents the nexus of rights and obligations embedded within robust social networks. Hoggett (1997) considers Etzioni's model of communitarianism to be moral and authoritarian. It was this model that was taken up by the Blair government, appealing to the idea of a lost age of strong neighbourhoods and family ties.

The tensions that exist between self-interest and commitment to the community, represent for Keane (1998), the relationship between civil society and the state. The distinction between *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society) suggests two different forms of social bond, one based on similarity, the other on interdependence and exchange (*c.f.* Tonnies 1887 cited in Hoggett 1997, p.4). For Keane, civil society represents an ideal-typical category that describes and envisages the complex and dynamic ensemble of legally protected, non-governmental institutions that are non-violent, self-organising, self-reflexive and permanently in tension with one another, and with the state institutions that frame, constrict and enable their actions (Keane 1998, p.6). Democracy represents that special type of political system in which civil society and state institutions tend to function as necessary, albeit separate but contiguous, distinct but interdependent, internal articulations of a system in which the exercise of state power is subject to public disputation, compromise and agreement. The work of the democratic project is about steering a course between the extensions of total state power into the non-state sphere on the one hand and the abolition of the state and the building of spontaneous agreement among citizens living within civil society on the other. In other words, democracy allows for apportioning and monitoring the exercise of power within politics, marked by institutionally distinct, but always mediated realms of civil society and state institutions. Therefore, this process is necessarily to do with power relations. Keane calls for a revised theory of democracy that could meet, head-on, the dominant tendency in Western political thought, to define political systems as power-ridden relationships between superiors and inferiors. Rather, the exercise of power is best monitored and controlled publicly within the democratic order, marked by the institutional separation of civil society and state institutions.

For Keane, the worldwide expansion of the language of civil society is bound up with the democratic growth of non-governmental civic organisations operating at the international level. Civil society offers equilibrium between state and non-state institutions. To this end, argues Keane, the language of civil society has been over-determined by the dysfunctions created by an over-reach of the state,

and a spreading conviction that only civil societies can do certain things or perform certain functions best. According to this analysis, a civil society, or rather a *more* civil society - the favoured objective of social institutions such as markets, public spheres, and voluntary associations - is considered a 'good thing'. This has led to new controversies about possible types of compromise between the state and civil institutions as well as the nature, performance, and limits of those civil society institutions themselves. Therefore, defining the boundaries between the role of civil society and the role of the state is key to a modern democratic settlement that allows for community engagement, empowerment and purposeful action.

Thus a belief in the democratic process and the value of human beings, underpins these views of community and civil society. The arguments for community engagement and empowerment are often strong and redolent in righteous zeal. However, communities are not homogeneous. They are multi-faceted, stratified, and complex. Individuals are members of several communities at any one time. Communities exist within communities. Such communities can even be conflicting. What binds communities together can also be limiting – setting up barriers for entry or exit. That which empowers can also be oppressive. It is what happens at the boundaries and intersections of communities that is of significance. Inter- and intra-community relations are ultimately dependent on the balances of power. Who holds the balance of power in the democratic process and to which 'communitarian' ideals they allude, in their broadest sense, is central to this discussion of the Big Society project.

Big Society an answer to Broken Britain?

Big Society represents a political and philosophical response to popular and intellectual notions of a 'broken Britain'. Indeed, David Cameron, whilst in opposition, commissioned a report from the Centre for Social Justice to address this issue. *Breakdown Britain* (Social Justice Policy Group 2006) argued the case for a Britain that needs mending; the preferred model for repair being the use of third-sector organisations (TSOs), those charitable and voluntary organisations

that demonstrate 'independence, enthusiasm, innovation, commitment and diversity' (*ibid*, p.20).

The welfare society has been breaking down on the margins, and the social fabric of many communities is being stripped away. Although this has been increasingly accepted by commentators and academics in recent years, a defensive complacency, akin to attitudes towards Britain's industrial decline in the 1970s, has characterised our reaction to this problem. Too many either do not care or feel powerlessness to do anything about it (*ibid*, p.14).

The persistent issues of poverty, inequality, social class, and institutional shortcomings are the Big Society's ultimate focus, an analysis that significantly fails, however, to take into account the vagaries of the market and the inequalities it generates.

Yet, an acceptance of the idea of a 'broken Britain', or a Britain in decline, has proved a defining motif of political discourse in the twentieth century and one that has been carried forward into the first decades of the twenty-first. According to English and Kenny (2000, p.253) 'decline', at its most basic, refers to a traceable process whereby Britain has diminished as a world power. This is decline in its *absolute* sense as opposed to the *relative* sense, which could be described as Britain's decline in relation to her rivals. The argument here is that there has been a diminution of British power in terms of military power, international weight, and economic productivity. However, whereas decline may be traceable and measurable, 'declinism' is ideological and concerns interpretation, perception, and diagnosis (Aughy 2010, p.12). According to this analysis, declinist philosophy constitutes three broad strands: a cultural critique that locates poor economic performance within an anti-modern social structure which hinders wealth production, an economic critique of entrepreneurial failure and industrial conservatism and finally, an institutional critique of government and the misdirection of resources (*ibid*). Blond (2010, p.72) for example, posits that this *anomie* has occurred at both the civic and social level, through the breakdown of trust, to the extent that the ideals expounded by Burke of a civic, religious,

political or social middle, acting as a balance between the demands of individuals and the power accrued by the state in delivering them, has now gone. In line with this declinist thinking, three specific themes related to the Big Society are identifiable in Cameron's (2009) Hugo Young lecture: realising equality of opportunity, state retrenchment, and a redistribution of power. State action, social action, and social entrepreneurship are the means to achieve this. This, in turn, entails a large-scale programme of state decentralisation via greater empowerment of intermediate institutions, greater emphasis on sharing British culture, a celebration of individual freedoms, and an audit of government (Norman and Ganesh 2006).

The size, scope and role of government in Britain has reached a point where it is now inhibiting, not advancing, the progressive aims of reducing poverty, fighting inequality and increasing well-being. Indeed there is a worrying paradox that, because of its effect on personal and social responsibility, the recent growth of the state has promoted not social solidarity, but selfishness and individualism (Cameron 2009).

Far from being a mere programme of change, advocates such as Blond (2010) argue that the Big Society project represents a radical, new political settlement that combines economic equity with social conservatism, thus creating 'a new politics of virtue' (*ibid*, p.185). What is called for is a resurgence of civic and community action, based on a renewed understanding of the values of community and mutual reciprocity. The model of localism promoted in the Big Society project is underpinned by a philosophical belief in aspects of communitarianism, reciprocal altruism, and the preservation and/or creation of institutions that maintain and promote civic values and co-operation, rather than simply 'rolling back' the state and allowing community organisations to fill the vacuum. The emphasis on institutions (including schools) and tradition (from which our civic/moral values emerge) distinguishes this form of localism from the way New Public Management was articulated under New Labour's social welfare reform. The language of targets, assessment and league tables has been subsumed into a discourse of freedom from central government control,

commissioning rather than managing and open access data evidenced in the National Health Service reforms where Primary Care Trusts have been replaced by GP commissioning services and the much troubled plans for a national medical records database.

Such ideas represent more than a simple ideology. According to Norman (2010) 'Big Society' is a political philosophy that contains within it a specific line of argument that criticises an over-extension of the state witnessed most clearly in recent decades, and the dependency and inefficiency that such over extension generates.

The growing evidence is that the state in its present form is manifestly insufficient to the task, in areas ranging from pensions to education, from housing to welfare provision. Indeed, we have reached the limits of the idea of the state as a remedy for social and economic failure. What is so striking is how impoverished political debate has become on these issues, and how reliant we are on a single and inflexible model of state provision of public services to solve our social ills (*ibid*, p.6).

In other words, the tools of government that addressed the needs of post-war Britain in the latter half of the twentieth century are no longer fit for purpose and must be replaced.

As a political philosophy however, these ideas are not unique to the English context and have resonance with the earlier American experience of the 1990s. Here, the 'reinventing government' movement represented a similar assault on 'big government', where governance was bound up with a normative evaluation of government and the programme required to reinvent it (Rose 2005, p.153). Osborne and Gaebler (1993) argued that the old bureaucratic models of government created in response to industrialisation were no longer suited to the modern context of knowledge-based societies, where information and communication technologies are evolving quickly. The debate, therefore, should not be about *how much* government is required to address these changes, albeit

more or less, but *what type* of government is necessary. For Osborne and Gaebler, the answer was an entrepreneurial model that necessitates a shift from government to governance.

Governance is the process by which we collectively solve our problems and meet our society's needs. Government is the instrument we use. The instrument is outdated and the process of reinvention has begun (*ibid*, p.24).

Good governance, therefore, means less government, but the reverse, more government meaning poor governance, is not necessarily true.

Using economic arguments and the impact of globalisation on standards of living as the *raison d'être* for this change, Osborne and Gaebler argue there is less money for government, i.e. for 'doing things' such as delivering services, whilst at the same time, there is an increased demand for governance or leading society. Government becomes all about steering (policy setting) rather than rowing (service delivery) and the two should be separate functions. This is the hallmark of entrepreneurial governments. It allows for the use of competition between service providers, reserves maximum flexibility to respond to changing circumstances, and helps to insist on accountability for quality performance (*ibid*, p.35). Underpinning this so-called 'reinvention movement' are recurring themes of decentralisation and deregulation, employee and customer empowerment, mission and outcomes orientation, competition and market mechanisms. Not all these themes necessarily converge or are mutually supportive. Instances of early Coalition Government policy-making following these guidelines are, the flagship education policy of Free Schools, and the extension of civil liberties in the scrapping of ID cards and centralised databases such as ContactPoint, examples which have demonstrated the inherent tensions between government steering and community action.

In spite of obvious tensions and inconsistencies, the Big Society resonated with David Cameron's deliberate promotion of a more compassionate Conservative party, acting as an agent of social responsibility. This is seen as an attempt to

draw a line under the negative fallout from Thatcher's contention that 'there is no such thing as society' (Keay 1987). This particular view of Conservatism, standing for a lack of care for the needy, gained further traction following the poll tax riots of 1990 and the cash for questions furore of 1994 (Davis 2010). Davis's contention here is that the search to inspire a bigger society, although contingent on the rebranding of the Conservative party in a more favourable light, was in fact, part of a much wider and long-standing project. For example, David Willetts, 'the father of Cameronism', in his pamphlet *Civic Conservatism* (1994) sought to refashion discussion of social institutions and their potential for co-operation. Also cited are Tim Montgomerie who founded the Renewing One Nation project (reminiscent of Disraeli's One Nation Toryism) to 'strengthen communities', 'invest in families' and to 'build character'. The project was to become the forerunner of the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) founded in 2004 under the leadership of Iain Duncan Smith. Other protagonists of a caring Conservatism include Greg Clark, who argued against the invasion of civil society by government in his *Total Politics*, published in 2003, and Steve Hilton, who set up the consultancy 'Good Business' in 1997 and, with Gibbons, published a book of the same name in 2002. The latter called for corporate social leadership in defence of global capitalism, considered the essence of good business.

A third strand in Cameron's view of civic innovation, identified by Davis (2010) is that of Progressive Conservatism. Launched by the Conservative think-tank Demos in 2009, the Progressive Conservatism project, chaired by David Willetts and run by Max Wind-Cowie, is organised around progressive values of personal and community empowerment, combating poverty and wrestling inequality. Publications associated with the project to date include such titles as *Resuscitating Democracy* (2009), *Recapitalising the Poor* (2009a), *Everyday Equality* (2010) and *Of Mutual Benefit* (2011). These publications, amongst many produced by Demos, argue for social responsibility, decentralisation and innovation as a counter to top-down bureaucratic approaches. Progressive Conservatism here is to be achieved through linking personal acquisition of assets and capital where the state helps to facilitate that acquisition. This is done through alliances with the private and voluntary sectors, and reform of parliament in order to be more responsive to its citizens.

The term 'progressive' in politics has a variety of meanings, generally associated with left-of-centre policy. It was in 2007 that Greg Clark and Jeremy Hunt claimed that the Conservatives, under Cameron, were the true progressives of British politics (Clark and Hunt 2007). In their analysis, progressive conservatism is not only 'orientated towards the future rather than yearning for the past' but it is about 'confronting vested interests' (*ibid*). However, Bale (2012) argues that the vested interests the Conservatives are most likely to take on, now they are leading the coalition government, are in the public rather than in the private sphere, and in the labour movement rather than in the private sector workforce. This appears to go against common understandings of the term progressive, and the ideas of the American political movement, to which it gave name in the nineteenth century.

Diamond (2011) on the other hand, presents progressive conservatism in terms of strategy rather than ideological direction. In his analysis, the new 'progressive' Conservatism witnessed in Europe, represents a potent challenge to traditional social democratic thought, seeking to control the centre-ground through a reputation of economic competence, scepticism about the efficiency of the state and efficacy of the public sector, and a belief in the role of traditional values in the context of contemporary society. The aim is a society where the 'leading force for progress is social responsibility, not state control' (UK Conservative Party Manifesto 2010). The state should be smaller, but the communitarian ties that bind citizens together remain important. Diamond identifies four strategic and pragmatic strands to progressive conservatism. First, establishing dominance on the economy by acknowledging the scale of public debt, and showing a willingness to make tough choices about the balance of tax rises and spending cuts, so as to steer a sustainable fiscal path. Second, redefining the political centre-ground by seizing the mantle of progressive reform from the centre-left; creating a new role for charities and the third sector in support of the poorest and most vulnerable in society, whilst negotiating careful reform of public entitlements such as health care, pensions, and social insurance. Third, being pragmatic in foreign affairs in terms of selective, international co-operation in the European Union, and within global institutions. According to Diamond, such strategies have made centre-right Conservative parties in Europe more electable

by striking a new balance between the politics of support and the politics of power. It means that progressive conservatism can reach out to lower and middle-income groups whilst at the same time appealing to its competence and fitness to rule rather than to a political ideology.

Finally, there is the argument for renewing traditional values in society, such as custom, belonging, morality and tradition; in other words, standing up for ways of life that are expressed and embodied within national identity which ought to be protected from the forces of modernity and marketisation.

Capitalism and Community

The inference here is that notions of community and civil society are threatened by the onslaught of capitalist ideology. Hirschman (1992), however, develops a more sophisticated thesis. The idea that commerce and the market economy can have a powerful moralising force in civil society is only one of four key critiques of market society; the 'doux-commerce thesis' of the pro-market, the 'self-destruction thesis' of the anti-capitalist camp and the 'feudal-shackles thesis'. Pro-marketeers from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, such as Thomas Paine and Ricard and, later, Smith and Hume, argued for the civilising effects of market transactions. These include industriousness, assiduity, frugality, punctuality, and most importantly for the functioning of a market society, probity (*ibid*, p.109). Commerce here is a powerful moralising agent which brings with it nonmaterial improvements to society. As the Industrial Revolution progresses in Britain and Western Europe, so Marxist and conservative critiques of capitalism emerged. Capitalist society here displays a pronounced capacity to erode or undermine the moral foundations on which any society, including a capitalist one, must rest (*ibid*, p.110). As an almost opposite critique is the feudal-shackles thesis or 'unfinished-bourgeois-revolution' thesis which claims that certain societies that have been penetrated by capitalism have still held on to the previous social order. Capitalism has been undermined by holding on to pre-capitalist institutions and attitudes which militate against a proletarian revolution and fraternal socialism. Where there has been no feudal past as in America, authors such as Hartz (cited in Hirschman 1992) argued that the absence of a

feudal past can have equally deleterious results , where a feudal past is seen here as a positive contributor to subsequent social democratic development. In short, Hirschman indicates that these theses, although independently conceived, all contain elements of truth but no one thesis contains the whole truth. They also contain certain irreconcilable contradictions: capitalism as self-destructive and capitalism as a positive, moral influence, or capitalism as self-reinforcing and capitalism as self-undermining. However, recognising the inconsistencies does not mean that contradictory processes do not operate in society at the same time. They should not necessarily be represented as an either/or choice of ideologies but an indication of the complexities of current processes.

Polanyi's critique of liberal fundamentalism, that tendency to place the market at the centre of human nature and society, takes a slightly different stance. In line with Hirschman, capitalism is described as a self-regulating and ultimately a destructive system. For Polanyi the market takes place alongside other social principles such as reciprocity and redistribution and is normally embedded in social institutions; it has become the cornerstone of economic sociology in recent decades (Hart 2008, p.1136). His was perhaps a utopian project intended to 'dis-embed' the market economy from society. He does not deny the utilitarian aspects of the market but what is rejected, is the notion of a self-regulatory system. This is mere illusion as market mechanisms require the intervention of the state - an example of this would be the recent trend towards quantitative easing as an attempt to keep the flow of money supplies. Thus the tension is between claiming that the free market is increasingly disembodied from political oversight and acknowledging that it is in reality embedded in political processes that are kept largely invisible by liberal ideology. David Harvey (2005) adds to this debate claiming that the post-welfare state consensus represented embedded liberalism, whereas the neoliberal period is described as 'disembedded liberalism'. For Harvey, both represent species of liberalism, although the neoliberalism of recent years makes greater claims about the virtue of the market. The two major responses of the 20th century, either to emphasise the merits of individual freedom, or to subjugate the economy to the political will on the pretext of equality, are both unsatisfactory. The one generates huge inequalities whilst the other leads to the suppression of freedom. The alternative

is to develop institutions capable of guaranteeing a plural economy within a democratic framework. This must start from real economic movements rather than an abstract notion of social reform.

In summary, Big Society amounts to empowering communities to construct services tailored to their own needs through decentralisation and localism. The emphasis is on promoting social action, particularly through philanthropy, volunteering, charitable donation, and a continuation of New Labour's drive to open public services, this time to greater competition and involvement from the charitable and voluntary sectors. In line with liberal discourse, the focus is on the personal and collective benefits accrued from such engagements across all communities, rather than the targeted and interventionist agenda of New Labour that used children and families as the rationale for, and the means of, social policy reform (Simon & Ward 2010). Big Society looks to strengthening and renewing civic institutions such as the family, the church, unions, and activist organisations, to mediate between the needs of individuals and the state that could provide for them. As such, it brings together a number of recognisable political and philosophical strands from a variety of contemporary and traditional sources to construct a potentially 'new' model of state governance.

Chapter 2: Intellectual antecedents

What have been described so far are a variety of views claimed by Conservatives, and others, to underpin the notion of the Big Society. They raise a number of questions of which three are of particular interest: what are the intellectual antecedents to the Big Society; to what extent do they inform the narrative of the Big Society; what do these antecedents tell us about the limits and possibilities of the Big Society in relation to education? Underpinning these questions are central beliefs about the relationship between politics, the state and the market.

What are the intellectual antecedents, if any?

Amongst Big Society thinkers, two prominent intellectual frameworks are evident: a critique of liberalism, particularly neoliberalism on the one hand, and the aligning of the views of liberalism and conservatism on the other (Kelly 2012, p.23). Phillip Blond construes the Big Society as a pragmatic remedy for the failure of liberal ideas that have been in the ascendancy since the 1960s on both sides of the political divide. Jesse Norman (2010), however, hails it as a means of reconciling two seemingly opposing political ideologies – liberalism and conservatism. Whilst Blond draws on a rich tradition of European philosophical and theological thought, and a historical perspective informed particularly by the nineteenth century reformist conservative traditions of Burke and Disraeli, Norman turns to the twentieth century British political thinker Michael Oakeshott. Both approaches have influenced David Cameron in his attempt to reinvent British Conservatism as ‘a Modern Compassionate Conservatism’, not through ‘some slick re-branding exercise’ but through ‘fundamental change’ so that ‘we look, feel, think and behave like a completely new organisation’ (Cameron 2005).

Phillip Blond: Red Toryism and philosophical /theological thought

The work of Phillip Blond offers notable intellectual underpinning for the Big Society. Considered for a time the ‘only significant thinker of Cameron’s

entourage' (Gray 2010) his recent publication *Red Tory* (2010) proposes an agenda for this new conservatism. By rejecting vigorously the liberal ideas which dominated the twentieth century as responsible for the [perceived] social and political malaise in contemporary Britain, he argues for a revitalised, ethical conservatism of a property owning democracy as the counter to the twin evils of a rights based liberalism and a centralised welfare state (Chapman 2012, p.278).

Blond's overarching ideological principles amount to:

- Detaching social conservatism from neoliberal economics
- Demarking concern for the poor from class struggle
- Promoting localism and small scale employment initiatives against the hierarchies of state and multi-national corporations
- Establishing a clear role for elites in social management

(Coombs 2010, p.3)

Detaching social conservatism from neoliberal economics

Red Toryism represents Blond's attempt to realign conservatism with its roots in 18th and 19th century political thought. Blond's thesis is constructed upon a broad historical overview of post-Thatcherite conservatism, which he sees as a period dominated by an unfortunate split from the conservatism of Burke and Disraeli. According to this narrative, the 2007-8 global economic crisis served to reveal a profound vulnerability in the British economy, one created by a dual dependence on the financial sector and foreign capital flows (Blond 2010, p.39). The ensuing 'meltdown' resulted from the 'free market' economic model rigorously pursued on both sides of the Atlantic by Thatcher and Regan during the 1980s, and by their political successors situated on the left and right of the political divide. This particular economic model represents for Blond an assault on the very nature of conservatism itself. Whereas, he argues, the Conservative Party represents, for many, the party of free markets, those free markets have now dissolved into 'monopoly finance, big business and deregulated global capital' (Blond, 2009, unpaginated). In response, Blond aims to position his programme of *Red Toryism* as a 'triangulation of both the failures of left and right' (Coombs 2010,

p.4), since, in his opinion, neither the Labour party under Ed Milliband, nor Cameron's Conservatives, looked like producing a 'plausible analysis of the meltdown' (Blond 2009, unpaginated).

In Blond's view, there were two governing paradigms in Britain in the years following 1945 that contributed to this state of affairs. These were 'state sponsored Keynesianism ...[and] neo-liberalism' (*ibid*). Both positions share some important philosophical and economic assumptions about freedom, choice, and markets, and both positions have generated cross-party support. However, they have resulted, in Blond's view, in 'state authoritarianism and an atomised individualism' (*ibid*).

Look at the society we have become: we are a bi-polar nation, a bureaucratic, centralised state that presides dysfunctionally over an increasingly fragmented, disempowered and isolated citizenry. The intermediary structures of a civilised life have been eliminated, and with them the Burkean ideal of a civic, religious, political or social middle, as the state and the market accrue power at the expense of ordinary people. But if both 20th-century socialism and conservatism have converged on the market state, they have done so by obeying the insistent dictates of modernity itself. And modernity is nothing if not liberal. (*ibid*)

These objections summarise Blond's assessment of liberalism, an assessment that reiterates Burke's own critique in the aftermath of the French revolution. For Burke, the new French nation-state, which emerged from the Revolution, stood for a monolithic, top-down and repressive society, far removed from the society he valued in England which was made up of a multitude of small, diverse and organic communities based on families, local communities and networks (Kelly and Crowfoot 2012, p.112). The justification for the commercial society that emerged in England, with guaranteed property rights and the free exchange of property in markets, had antecedents in the customs and manners of chivalric society. Therefore, it follows, that the independent institutions of modern

commercial society emerged from this ancient, natural order, where the sanctity of profit and private exchange is divinely ordained, and both property and political power are distributed differentially according to rank (Edwards 2012, p.103). Hence, for Blond, “[T]he most extreme form of liberal autonomy requires the repudiation of society”, that is, as in Burke’s assessment of France, it ushers in the necessity of “big government’ (Blond 2009, unpaginated) and what is destroyed along the way is society itself.

A vision of the good life cannot come from liberal principles. Unlimited Liberalism produces atomised relativism and state absolutism. Insofar as both the Tories and Labour have been contaminated by liberalism, the true left-right legacy of the post war period is, unsurprisingly, a centralised authoritarian state and a fragmented and disassociative society (*ibid*).

This is because:

‘The liberal idea of man is ... first of all, an idea of nothing: not family, not ethnicity, not society or nation. But real people are formed by the society of others (*ibid*).

The argument is against a liberalism that induces, or at least promises, the self-satisfaction of the individual. Such self-satisfaction is a threat to what, elsewhere, has been termed ‘the ethics of care’ (Held 2006). This moral theory holds with the conception that human beings are relational and interdependent (both morally and epistemologically), rather than being merely self-sufficient individuals. Such a view acts counter to dominant liberal theories that have promoted a notion of the person as ‘a rational, autonomous agent or a self-interested individual’ (*ibid*, p.13). Every person starts out as a child, dependant on those providing care and remains interdependent with others in thoroughly fundamental ways throughout their lives.

‘That we can think and feel and act as if we were independent depends on a network of social relations making it possible for us to do so’ (*ibid*, p.14).

From this perspective, the liberal, individualist conception of the person fosters a false picture of society and the persons in it. It is impoverished as an ideal, failing to value the natural ties with others and the relationships that, in part, constitute personal identity. Such theories contribute to the breakdown of associative society. As Annette Baier asserts,

‘Liberal morality , if unsupplemented, may *unfit* people to be anything other than what its justifying theories suppose them to be, ones with no interest in each other’s interests’ (Baier 1994, p.29)

Antithetically, social conservatism is about reinstating society.

What Cameron describes as ‘compassionate conservatism’ is a ‘philosophy based on trust, responsibility and inclusiveness’:

The more we trust people, the stronger they and society become. We’re all in this together... we have a shared responsibility for our shared future... There is such a thing as society; it’s just not the same thing as the state.

We will stand up for the victims of state failure and ensure that social justice and economic opportunity are achieved by empowering people and communities (Cameron 2009, cited in Norman and Ganesh 2006, p.1)

Thus, according to Lee (2009, p.54), David Cameron’s construction of compassionate conservatism represents a strategic focus for conservative policy. Lee argues that a myriad of social problems could be attributed to the failures of New Labour’s extensive social policy reform agenda. Compassionate conservatism juxtaposes the unprecedented levels of material prosperity and

public spending on the welfare state, with examples of widespread societal breakdown (*ibid*). The key task is to separate state and society, particularly the state and civil society, through extending the opportunities for entrepreneurship. Neoliberalism, although it may be associated with economic growth, efficiency and widespread prosperity, cannot, of itself, address all economic and social problems. The state must allow civil society to flourish and counter individualism with a moral obligation to public service and social justice. Liberalism, therefore, in Blond's analysis can only be a virtue when linked to a politics of the common good.

Demarking concern for the poor from class struggle

Such ideas of civil society are closely associated with the origins of the trade union movement and other forms of association, configured around working class agitation and organisation emerging from industrialisation in nineteenth century Britain. Friendly societies and social unions, brought together workers and 're-made communities and loyalties around their places of work and residences' (Blond 2010, p.14). Blond has praised such 'autonomous working class associations' (*ibid*) for bettering the lives of the working poor. However, the welfare state that emerged out of this process, considered by its supporters as 'the zenith of working class achievement' (*ibid*), began the destruction of the independent life of the British working class. In Blond's analysis, the great tragedy of the welfare state is the corrosion of longstanding social values held by the working class and consequently, the erosion of the mutualism these values enshrined. Now the working class expect and rely on the state to provide, rather than looking to community, work, familial obligation and civic and economic participation (*ibid*, p.76). In this manner, welfare state policies have shifted the primary source of social support from the horizontal social networks of civil society, to vertically delivered equivalents. It is not that there should be no safety-net for the most vulnerable in society, but that there should also be a culture of specific behaviours available to raise people out of poverty, namely work, saving, investing and entrepreneurship. That these have become 'unfashionable' is not only the fault of welfarism *per se* but a succession of

economic policies that have preyed on peoples' desire for security, selling them insecurity via mortgaged home ownership.

In Blond's meta- narrative of post-war Britain, there is emphasis on the necessity for massive reconstruction (housing, business and basic social and economic infrastructure). Whereas the European response was to 'pool the interests of state, capital and waged workers' in this enterprise, in Britain few parties saw the need to abandon their sectional interests (Blond 2009, unpaginated). British unions, particularly, were unwilling to relinquish free collective bargaining. The result was industrial relations trapped in a state of unresolved class conflict; a state of affairs further exacerbated by the failures of management to re-invest profit. Unions, according to this scenario, represented institutions wedded to welfare serfdom. In addition, the Conservative response under Thatcher, failed to maintain the middle ground, instead deploying the state in favour of 'the owner and the entrepreneur' (*ibid*). This meant that the benefits of 'Conservative liberalisation' accrued to the top, widening the disparity between rich and poor: a situation that continued under New Labour. Thus, for Blond, mediating institutions such as grammar schools, trade unions, and regional businesses, have failed the poor. They have either been eliminated, or are no longer fit for purpose (Blond 2013).

Throughout this analysis, Blond holds a strongly anti-Marxist stance, defining Marx as 'just another dispossessor of the poor' (Blond 2009, unpaginated). However, for Coombs (2010), the difference in the 'red' of *Red Toryism* and that of Marxism is most obvious in Blond's belief in localism. The current economic situation is attributed to the lack of separation between local, and national and international capital. The lack of local capitalism and the grip of what Blond calls 'modal capitalism', is at the root of the crisis (*ibid*, p.4). The call, therefore, is for a conservatism that represents a break from the 'monopoly logic of the market state' and brings in a 'traditional, communitarian, civic conservatism' (Blond 2009, unpaginated). Described as 'a new form of politics which links egalitarianism to the pursuit of objective values and virtues' this is what John Milbank understands as 'traditionalist socialism or a '*Red Toryism*' (Milbank, cited in Newman 2009)

Promoting localism

This 'politics of virtue', resembles similar approaches to social policy of the past, which sought to move beyond the politics of left and right and revive a system of virtues based on a universally shared set of higher ideals (Blond 2009, unpaginated). In Blond's view, the erosion of the infrastructure of civil society reflects a moral and cultural crisis, far more than an economic one. The state is too powerful and intrusive, and the neoliberal conception of the market too hegemonic thereby diminishing, or at least marginalising, the place and role of the key agents of civil society (Smith 2012, p.332). Power would be better devolved to local communities, thus enabling the regeneration of a mutual society.

What is called for is a 'moralised market', something akin to local protectionism (Coombs 2010, p.4) where the market via 'free guilds' and 'voluntary associations' at local level can flourish as a benign monopoly (Blond 2010, p.192). To achieve this form of market without the overbearing hand of big government, demands a new form of capitalism based on trust and a different form of civic and productive organisation. This notion of a localised market, supported by local employers employing local workers, is reminiscent of the German *Mittelstand*. The *Mittelstand* represents those small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) employing, according to the German definition, up to five hundred employees and with an annual turnover of up to €50m or, according to the European definition, employing up to 250 employees or with an annual turnover of up to €50m. According to the German Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology, many of these successful enterprises are characterised by features such as independence and family ownership. Such firms tend to be founded and managed by entrepreneurs, who, typically, aim to hand on the leadership of these family businesses to their children. Indeed, roughly 95% of all German firms are family owned and approximately 85% of these are managed by their owner (BMWl, n.d., p.5). Of the approximately 3.7 million companies in Germany in 2010, more than 99% can be classed as belonging to the German *Mittelstand*.

Historically, many *Mittelstand* companies were started at the turn of the last century, with others appearing after World War II. They represented a major engine of German industrial growth and played a substantial part in the post war 'Wirtschaftswunder' (economic miracle). By 2011 they accounted for around 37% of the total turnover of all German firms. In comparison with similar companies, particularly in the US and UK, German *Mittelstand* companies are active primarily in the industrial sector. Almost one quarter of all German employees work in this sector (*ibid*, p.7). According to European Commission figures (*ibid*, p.10), approximately 15.5 million people (61.3%) are employed by the German *Mittelstand* in jobs subject to social security contributions, in comparison to 53.7% in the UK, and 46.2% in the US.

There are five key factors relating to the success of the German *Mittelstand* model (Studzinski 2013). These have resonance with the Big Society ideal.

First, the *Mittelstand* ethos is one where business is viewed as a constructive enterprise that aims to be socially useful. Making a profit is not an end in itself but job creation, client satisfaction, and product excellence are just as fundamental. Taking on debt is treated with suspicion. The objective of every business leader is to earn trust from employees, customers, suppliers and society as a whole. Business and education are 'natural bedfellows' (*ibid*).

Second, the *Mittelstand* generates a collaborative spirit between employer and employees. A system of works councils ensures that employees' interests are safeguarded, whether or not they belong to a trade union. German workers expect their employers to keep training them and enhancing their skills.

Furthermore, there is a determination amongst *Mittelstand* companies to build for the long term. To this end, they tend to keep core functions such as engineering and project management in-house, while outsourcing production whenever this proves more efficient (*ibid*). According to Studzinski's analysis, the fact that *Mittelstand* companies are overwhelmingly privately owned, and thus largely free of pressure to provide shareholder returns, means that they are readier to

innovate and invest a larger proportion of their revenues into research and development.

Fourth, German companies work closely with their suppliers, and by inference build relationships of loyalty and trust. Finally, the *Mittelstand* operates within a context of a highly decentralised German economy and political system, with the result that local banks, businesses, entrepreneurs and politicians build close relationships with each other, making everyday co-operation easier. At the national level, Germany's leaders rarely miss an opportunity to promote their country's industry abroad (*ibid*). All this sits within a European Union Entrepreneurship Action Plan (ec.europa.eu) setting out a desire to promote entrepreneurship with regional SME policies and the promotion of SME envoys.

Blond's moral critique of unfettered liberalism and the UK workforce has more to do with the pursuit of wrong ideas, such as free collective bargaining and class conflict, rather than the inevitable logic of capitalism (Coombs 2010, p.4), a view also to be found in the works of Hayek: free society was 'gravely threatened' by the powers aggregated by the unions. Unions had achieved a position of unique privilege using coercion, in ways not available to other institutions (Gamble 1996, p.171). They needed to be brought back within the rule of law. Although starting out as civil institutions, they had developed into organisations that restricted the freedom of their members and lobbied governments on the merits of collectivist schemes, or other measures that would favour their members (*ibid*). Instead, businesses such as the John Lewis Partnership, based on horizontal organisational structures, are promoted by Blond as exemplars of ethical, commercial, and managerial success (Coombs 2010, p.5; Smith 2012, p.333). In this manner, the moral alternative, rather like the German *Mittelstand* outlined above, is a local capitalism based on trust at all levels of the economic system, between employer and employee, manager and producer, consumer and provider. Morality and provincialism become two sides of the same coin (Coombs 2010, p.5). This raises questions of where this shared morality is to come from, in what is it grounded and who is to promote and maintain its currency?

Establishing a clear role for elites in social management

Blond's answer is an educated elite, the 'philosopher kings' (Smith 2012, p.335), amongst whom Blond himself has been named in the British press, will guard against people acting according to their own self-interest and making those 'wrong choices' to which his historical account of British liberalism gives emphasis. The individualism and self-satisfaction generated by liberalism, has removed any sense of collective responsibility from society, where care for each other overrides the desire to look after oneself. The proposed new world of the Big Society, restores society and the individuals who comprise it, to an elevated position over and above the state and market, which, so far, have conspired to reduce a large proportion of its constituent members to serfdom. Heading this new social configuration are appropriately educated persons, an elite who embody those essentially Christian values required for Blond's moral market to exist.

Moral markets, and a return to civic association, require
Christian values: mutuality, subsidiarity, reciprocity, solidarity,
mediation (both in the theological and institutional sense)
(Blond, cited in Beckford 2011)

The idea of philosopher king is found in Plato's *The Republic* and relates directly to Plato's notion of the ruler being both philosopher and guardian. For Duncan (Duncan & Steinberger 1990, p.1319) the justification for the introduction of philosopher kings, is the founding of justice. Guardians can rule over the political approximation of the just city but they cannot make the city just. Justice cannot be found in the political world (although many believe that it can). The best the political world can offer is order and harmony (*ibid*) but these, of themselves, do not equate with justice. Duncan claims that justice, according to Plato, is both natural and spontaneous, the product of human contemplation and discovery. Justice becomes necessary when human desires in the physical world exceed what is necessary for existence. To this end, the *kallipolis* of Plato's *Republic* represents the peoples' wish to have all their desires met and still have justice. Only in the political world do men and women need guardians to protect them

from each other and from themselves. 'The rule of the philosopher king makes the apolitical city possible again' (*ibid*). When they rule, there are no guardians in the political sense of the word, rather the two have become one.

One sphere of operation for modern day philosopher kings is the think tank, either those independent or sponsored by the various political parties. Think tanks such as the *Fabian Society* date back as far as the nineteenth century. Hayek, for example, was most closely associated the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), providing them with an intellectual and theoretical critique of liberal policy. Blond founded *ResPublica* in 2009. Think tanks offer a vehicle for the promotion and dissemination of ideas. In this manner, the role of Blond's philosopher kings becomes closely associated with two, radical and fundamental changes required to bring about the new model civil society: that the bureaucracy of big government be dismantled and redistributed at local levels, and that the stranglehold of globalised markets and 'modal monopoly' be subverted through the power of local networks of production and economic activity. Modal monopoly is:

a model of monopoly that extends beyond whether an individual company has undue market influence to whether a certain mode or way of doing business constitutes a cartel
(Blond 2009, unpaginated)

First, in order to return the administrative systems and governing powers to local communities, Blond is expecting the elite to go against their own self-interest as a class and act according to the principle of self-sacrifice. It is through the bureaucratic state that the necessity of a bureaucratic state is undone. In other words, there is a power at work in the state that is not self-interested in the perpetuation of bureaucracy. There is similarity here with Hayek's theory of knowledge and notion of the 'Great Society'. Adopting the term used by Adam Smith, Hayek's Great Society is the culmination of an evolutionary process from primitive to modern society. It is a highly decentralised society, where as many people as possible will be involved in taking decisions about production. The ideal individual in the Great Society is the entrepreneur – an individual 'prepared

to take calculated risks, make full use of the unique knowledge they possess, and take the opportunities that are open to them (Gamble 1996, p.72). These individuals will acquire self-discipline, by taking responsibility for themselves and others (their dependents), and in so doing, develop the essential moral traits required to sustain and develop the Great Society.

Second, the iron grip of globalised markets can only be loosened via resurgence in local democracy and systematic change to the administrative organisation of government. Here, the recent housing crash serves as a warning, an example of 'the absorption of all local, regional and national systems of credit into one form of global credit'. This created undue reliance on one source of credit supply. The residential asset market collapsed when this supply was compromised.

[T]he big banks were dedicated to generating price fluctuations and asset bubbles and then exiting before their demise. This strategy of market manipulation deployed enormous amounts of capital in speculative arbitrage (just five US banks had control of over \$4 trillion of assets in 2007 (Blond 2009, unpaginated).

This current manipulation of the market by a few, very powerful transnational companies, is far removed from that of the small investor envisaged by classical free-market thinkers. Phenomena such as the German *Mittelstand* indicate the potential strength of smaller, regional firms as a viable alternative to big business monopoly. In the UK, a recent GE Capital Report (2013) *Leading from the Middle*, argued for the strength of mid-market firms in the UK. Like the German *Mittelstand*, the report found that mid-market firms were firmly grounded in local markets, outsourcing only 15% of their operating costs and preferring local suppliers, thereby retaining spending in the local area (*ibid*, p.9).

The approach translates itself into a unique sense of community. While an average 46% of German, French and Italian mid-market firms believe they are pillars of their local community, that figure rises to 56% for UK mid-market

companies. Similarly, 49% of such firms in the UK recognise they are crucial to the local economy compared to 41% in the rest of the EU-4 countries (*ibid*).

Furthermore, they proved to be innovative, particularly in the field of process and systems innovation, as against new product innovation. There is a perception of a lighter regulatory burden in UK mid-market companies in comparison with their European counterparts, although, keeping pace with regulatory change remains a significant challenge. Access to affordable finance also appears more favourable to the UK context than in other EU-4 regions (*ibid*, p.10).

Blond's argument is not, however, that the local replaces the global, if the example of the *Mittelstand* is to be followed. German *Mittelstand* companies have a strong position in foreign markets. Indeed, their mantra is 'think global, act local' (*ibid*, p.11). Rather, the German model explains Blond's assertion that local networks of production and economic activity, be that local or international, are interdependent.

Blond and Liberalism

In order to understand why the legacy of liberalism produces both state authoritarianism and atomised individualism, Blond takes a sweeping historical approach, arguing that philosophical liberalism was born out of an 18th-century critique of absolute monarchies. Its primary purpose was to protect the rights of the individual from arbitrary abuse by the king. However, it was the defence of individual liberty that became paramount, leading to the breakdown in society. Yet, for Blond, to pursue the logic of individual autonomy would result in a society that required 'a powerful central authority to manage the perpetual conflict between self-interested individuals' (Blond 2009, unpaginated). Thus, the unintended consequence of unlimited liberalism is the controlling state: 'that most illiberal of entities' (*ibid*). This explains why:

'[e]ven the most "communitarian" liberals—from philosophers like Michael Sandel to politicians like Ed Miliband—cannot

promote community without big government. They see the state as the answer, when it usually makes the problem worse. The legacy of liberal individualism is the restoration of the very absolutism that it originally sought to overthrow—a philosophical tragedy that can be summed up as: “the king is dead, long live the king” (*ibid*).

Blond’s critique makes a distinction between ‘classical liberalism’ and its more radical cousin, ‘libertarianism’; a distinction which he simplifies into the difference between what he sees as the free markets of Hayek’s and Friedman’s ‘bastardised laissez-faire inversion of it’ (Blond 2010, p.34). His argument is that the classical liberalism of thinkers such as Adam Smith, John Locke, and Alexis de Tocqueville (amongst whom he also includes Hayek), adheres to *laissez-faire* economic policies, thought to lead to more freedom and real democracy. Yet, in fact, Hayek had much in common politically with monetarist economists like Milton Friedman (Gamble 1996, p.168), in that both shared assumptions about the value of free markets and enterprise and both looked to a limited state as the only way compatible with maintaining the autonomous, private sphere. However, Hayek never accepted monetarism as a sound economic theory. For him, it represented another version of macro-economics, setting elaborate monetary targets in an attempt to fine-tune economic aggregates. Libertarians (neoliberals) such as Milton Friedman and the Chicago School of economists, favoured interventionist, monetarist economic policies, holding the pursuit of liberty paramount, particularly economic and commercial liberty, with a corresponding de-emphasis on other liberal purposes and values such as democracy and justice (Thorsen and Lie n.d.). In contrast, Hayek’s preferred approach was to create the right institutional framework that would make sound money possible. Favouring *laissez-faire* economic policies meant the role of the state is kept minimal such that, with the exception of the armed forces, law enforcement and other public services, the state leaves everything to the free dealings of its citizens and the organisations they freely chose to establish and take part in (*ibid*).

On the basis of his analysis of libertarian/neoliberal economics, Blond argues that, 'power and wealth flow upwards to the centralisers of capital' (Blond 2010, p.34), creating a new class of 'middle men' who exert disproportionate influence over the market, in turn creating monopolies and a class of super-rich who reduce the poor to a new form of serfdom. Parties on both sides of the political divide have contributed to this legacy of a centralised, authoritarian state and a disassociative society (Coombs 2010, p.4). In other words 'unlimited liberalism produces atomised relativism and state absolutism' (Blond 2009, unpaginated)

Whilst Blond may be correct to locate the rise of liberalism as a defence against the power of monarchy, his analysis is selective. Foucault maps out a far more complex progression of liberalism on the European stage and locates the emergence of neoliberalism, not as part of the natural evolution of classical liberalism, but as a new order altogether. Whereas liberalism may stand for protecting the rights and liberties of individuals against the power of the state, neoliberalism, in its European, German form, represents a justification of the state where no theory of state previously existed;

'what is involved is a new programming of liberal governmentality. It is an internal reorganisation that, once again, does not ask the state what freedom it will leave to the economy, but asks the economy how its freedom can have a state-creating function and role in the sense that it will really make possible the foundation of the state's legitimacy? (Foucault 1979, p.95)

The role of the market in constructing the state and its practices of government, governance and governing, is crucial to Foucault's narrative. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries mercantilism represented the state's form of government; the police (law) marked its internal management and the army and diplomacy stood for organisation, maintaining equilibrium between nation states across Europe. By the middle of the eighteenth century 'political economy' exerted self-limitation on government reason, which set itself the objective of the state's enrichment via the growth of the population on the one hand, and the means of subsistence on the other (*ibid*, p.14). The new art of government, thus, became

the organisation of numerous and complex internal mechanisms, whose function was to limit the exercise of government power internally (*ibid*, p.27). The consequent appearance of political economy and the notion of least government or 'government frugality' in this narrative are linked. More significantly, the market becomes the locus of truth. Whereas, in previous centuries, it was the site of justice, requiring regulation and protection for both buyer and merchant, by the eighteenth century the market represented something that obeyed natural and spontaneous mechanisms of its own. Through this process, value came to assert itself as a measure of truth. Prices, therefore, are not fixed, but fluctuate according to what the market can sustain. The state, society and the market are inexorably intertwined. Thus, for Foucault, the crucial question of liberalism is 'what is the utility value of government and all actions of government in a society where exchange determines the true value of things?' (*ibid*, p.46).

What Foucault charts is fundamental change on two levels, that of the state and that of the market. Justification of the state moves from the (external) anointed authority of the monarch, through *raison d'Etat* (political economy), to internal justification via the organisation and mechanisms of state, including economic exchange. In the post-war period in Europe, the market itself plays a significant role in legitimating the state, as in the case of Germany. In seeking to answer Foucault's question, liberalism shifts from the pursuit of individual liberty and property rights that exist apart from the authority and powers of the monarch, to the liberty of the market, such that the market was able to extend beyond national or international boundaries.

Power, therefore, lies not in labour, as Marx has argued in his labour theory of value, but in the possession of property. It is in this respect that both Hayek and Friedman shared basic assumptions about the value of free markets and enterprise. A limited state is the only way compatible with maintaining an autonomous, private sphere of exchange. For economic liberals such as Friedman, democracy requires capitalism in order to function. But truth, value, and justice become the casualties of exchange in a society where the ownership and exchange of goods is not equitable. Liberalism, eventually, was to take two different but not necessarily opposing positions. Left-facing liberalism took a

more social and ethical stance and included exponents such as Isaiah Berlin. This form of liberalism sought to address those inequalities that gave rise to the injustices of weak versus strong bargaining positions in the market place. State intervention in the market is justified in order to achieve this end. The goal of right-facing liberalism or libertarianism, however, was to maintain the status quo and the advantages of those with property and therefore power. State intervention, according to this view, is justified in defence of market freedoms that also serve to legitimate the state. Blond's critique of liberalism misses the subtleties of these shifts and of Foucault's repositioning of the state in relation to the market, although Blond does acknowledge the influence of liberalism on party political thought.

For Gamble (1996, p.100), it is Hayek who embodies the convergence of liberal and conservative ideas. The new ascendancy of the doctrines of economic liberalism in the 1970s and 1980s, created some issues in terms of labelling. In order to distinguish themselves from supporters of collectivism and the extended state, with which the term liberal had become associated, proponents of new liberalism variously called themselves conservative –liberals, liberal-conservatives, neoliberals or libertarians. The latter became popular in the United States. The amalgam of libertarian and conservative positions, from the late 1960s, in both Britain and the United States, was widely described as constituting the New Right. Hayek was the single most important intellectual influence on their thinking (*ibid*, p.101), bridging both conservative and liberal ideas. Blond appears to be a supporter of Hayek's because of the latter's favouring of classical liberal principles. Hayek's own stance is more complicated and rests on his distinction between true and false individualism. Hobbes, Locke and Mill represent, for Hayek, false individualists. Hume, Smith, Burke and Tocqueville on the other hand, are counted amongst the true individualists who share a scepticism of human reason and the ability of humans to control or plan societies (*ibid*, p.106). Humans are, however, capable of discerning the institutional pattern which will bring about prosperity and progress. Those institutional structures associated with capitalism and modern industry, being natural and spontaneous, are endorsed and justified whereas those of the state and democracy are rejected for being artificial and contrived. Yet the former

depend on the latter. Spontaneous evolution alone cannot guarantee the preservation of the market (*ibid*).

It is in this light therefore, that Blond's understanding of a symbiotic relationship between the state and the market can be understood. The market can both fund and deliver state services, because, he argues, big business is better able to absorb the cost of renewed social aspirations set by the state and the ensuing bureaucratic burden. Listed variously are health and safety regulation, the complexity of tax returns, holiday and sickness pay, pension and national insurance contributions. The presumption is big businesses and their shareholders, led by the moral elite, would shun for-profit practices and motives, behaviours that have won them the power and influence they currently wield, in favour of alternative procedures that support and maintain local networks of commerce. Indeed, this would also involve turning their backs on the products of globalisation, the power of transnational corporations, the relentless pursuit of economic growth, international integration and the economies of mass production and scale (Coombs 2010, p.5).

Furthermore, Blond posits that if society were self-policing through a shared commitment to social and moral norms amongst the lower orders, there would be less need for heavy central regulation. The diminishing of the regulatory burden would enable smaller agents to enter the market place, injecting new blood into the system and tilting the system away from the monopolistic interests of the few, towards the more holistic interests of the many (Blond 2010, p.286). This, then, is the new moralised market, both localised and participatory, and reminiscent of the ideals of Burke and Disraeli. Local people would have a stake and a voice in the services they engage in. In this way, Blond envisages how 'the state of ownership and the ownership of the state would be extended to the masses' (*ibid*).

Underwriting Blond's account of the moral market and the new associative civil society is his 'politics of virtue' that demands a revitalisation of the family, civil culture, and a return to 'virtue, tradition and the priority of the good' (Smith 2012, p.333), where these honourable behaviours and traditions can be learned and

practised. However, neither moral values, nor their philosopher king gatekeepers, emerge from a vacuum. Although not made explicit in *Red Tory*, there is a Christian subtext to Blond's vision of the Big Society that is apparent elsewhere in his speeches and in his associations with the theologian John Milbank and the Radical Orthodoxy movement to which he belongs. Without this 'political theology' underpinning, Blond's vision of the Big Society struggles to find real purchase.

Radical orthodoxy and John Milbank

Milbank's publications *Theology and Social Theory* (2005) and *Radical Orthodoxy* (1998) have both been highly influential and form the basis of the Christian and politically anti-liberal Radical Orthodoxy movement amongst academic theologians. Blond's political theory is strongly influenced by the writings of John Milbank who acknowledged that *Red Toryism* 'represents Radical Orthodoxy's debut on the political stage' (Newman 2009). Although not altogether explicit in *Red Tory*, Chapman (2012, p.278)), for example, argues that Blond and Milbank share an interpretation of the grand narrative of the development of modernity based on the decline and fall of theology found in the work of the medieval philosopher-theologian John Duns Scotus. It was Scotus who elevated *Being* (finite reality) to a status above God, where it can be understood in its own terms, thereby separating philosophy and theology: the natural from the supernatural, faith from reason. In response to this 'autonomy of the secular' (*ibid*, p.279) and the 'violence of denial', Radical Orthodoxy argues for a return to Christianity's medieval roots where faith and reason were inseparable. It is radical in that it claims the radical otherness of God and revelation.

Underpinning Milbank's Radical Orthodoxy, is an anti-liberal thesis that warns of liberalism's inherent nihilism. Milbank's undated *Liberty versus Liberalism*, calls for an altogether new way of thinking. One that:

'will take up the traditions of socialism less wedded to progress, historical inevitability, materialism and the State, and put them into

debate with conservative anti-capitalist thematics and the traditions of classical and Biblical political thought (Milbank n.d., p.1).

It is Milbank's view, that a secular culture will only sustain what he terms 'the neo-liberal catastrophe' (*ibid*).

Milbank argues that the origins of liberalism sprang from the idea that individuals need protecting from a variety of threats to themselves and to property. This has led to the curtailing of civil liberties by the state and the passing of ever more draconian security laws, justified in terms of protecting individual security and freedom of choice. Thus, and resonating with Hayek's thesis in *The Road to Serfdom* (Hayek 2001), contemporary polity is moving inexorably towards despotism (Smith 2012, p.335). Following the decay of all tacit restraints embedded in family, locality and mediating institutions between the individual and the state, Government will ultimately assume an entirely policing and military function (Milbank n.d., p.2). One example of this is the Stephen Lawrence affair, which indicated undercover activity on the part of the police to discredit the family and campaigners in the case of the murdered black teenager (Muir 2013). By contrast, the tacit restraints to which Milbank refers, appear to be modelled in the 'family' of the church body, where '[d]ifferent people and groups have different talents and insights – these they share for the good of the whole body' (*ibid*, p.3). Such actions imply mutual respect, love, reciprocity, and justice, all of which serve as a counter to individualism, since the individual 'is socially defined only as a lone chooser and self-seeker' (*ibid*).

Thus, Milbank calls for an alternative view of democracy and economic engagement. Democracy is justified because it is essentially theological. This belief helps in the understanding of Milbank's assertion of the giftedness of life and a hierarchical society where gift replaces contract. As already indicated, people and groups embody different talents and insights, and should share them for the good of the whole body. Christians, for example, offer back their goods to Christ to be used in his name. In similar manner, the people should give their gifts of insight and talents back to the sovereign representative on earth, who acts in their name. The role of the sovereign becomes one of distributing the gifts

of good governance and order. For Milbank, this is about government pursuing the intrinsic fulfilment of its citizens. Subjects share in the government and appropriate tasks to themselves. Such an order highlights the radical nature of this view of democracy. Sovereign rule is about the offer of the gift of good co-ordination of talents and needs, based on the Biblical principle of justice and the assumption that only a few will be bestowed with such a gift. It is conservative rather than liberal, therefore, in that it insists on the monarchic, aristocratic and corporate (Milbank n.d., p.4) and furthermore stands totally opposed to the notion of the nation state as the ultimate unit.

This theological interpretation of democracy, allies itself with the Catholic notion of subsidiarity; the delegation of responsibility to the smallest and least centralised component body. An essential element of Catholic Social Thinking, subsidiarity derives its meaning from the Latin *subsidium*, and operates as both a positive and negative force (Hanvey 2011, p.4). Positively, subsidiarity is the recognition by a higher authority of the legitimate competence and ability of a lower authority. It is not, therefore, the mere deregulation of power but rather the recognition of a power or competence that already exists. Subsidiarity assumes the responsibility of the higher authority to assist the lower authority to exercise its competence for the social good in such practical ways as ensuring economic, as well as, legal and administrative resources. Negatively this means the higher authority will not subjugate the competence of the lower authority to its own ends. The former is always aligned to the latter, thus, preserving the realm of civil freedoms and initiatives. To some extent, it must protect the civic and personal realm from economic exploitation. '[S]ubsidiarity attempts to ensure that national Government does not 'rule' but serves the social body' (*ibid*).

Accordingly, this view of Catholic Social Teaching ascribes to subsidiarity a commitment to the political process and the means of creating and sustaining a wholesome, civil society, which includes social and economic justice for the poor. Milbank's inference from this is that people form and reform micro-social groups (Milbank n.d., p.4). Government, therefore, should not treat people according to formal constructs of region, profession, culture, or religion, but look to the talents and insights offered by such small groups in the co-production of state

government and the outworking of justice. Government interest in mobilising the voluntary sector is perhaps a case in point.

Democracy, seen through this lens, has a strong impact on the economic domain. In contrast, modern liberalism, according to Milbank's thesis, has only succeeded in delivering mass poverty, the erosion of freely associating bodies beneath the level of the state and the ecological dereliction of the earth. The rights and dignity of the worker have been abolished. As a counter to this, Milbank calls for a truer liberality based on the creed of generosity, which supposes that societies are more fundamentally bound together by mutual kindness than by contract. Solutions do not lie in the purely capitalist market or in the centralised state. Rather, Milbank calls for an element of gift exchange within the modern market based on local economies that link local skills, local products, and local production. In order for sovereign authority to maintain a 'light touch' (*ibid*, p.8) there must be a collective interest in a sustainable and stable economy in which every person enjoys what is legitimately his own because it meets some of his basic needs and allows sufficient scope for the exercise and marketing of his talents. This means that prosperity should be widely and equally dispersed, to ensure people have real, creative liberty, little interest in greed and a tendency to form self-regulating mechanisms for the exchange of benefits (*ibid*, p.9). Property that is to do with self-fulfilment, rather than the accumulation of wealth, is the foundation for free giving and receiving. Giving is only really free and liberal where it respects and helps further to create reciprocal norms. Professional associations and guilds, as well as co-operative banks and credit unions, maintain the agreement about what is valuable. Organisations such as these delimit market tendencies towards the 'anarchy of desires' (*ibid*, p.11).

The history of anti-globalisation protests offers an example of Milbank's collective interest in a sustainable and stable economy and a self-regulating society. The worldwide movement grew from a disparate series of small single-interest groups. Most recently have been the 'Occupy' campaigns including the Occupy London camp at St Paul's Cathedral in 2012 (Walker 2012), and the local protests against Tesco supermarkets (This is Dorset 2013).

Hierarchies, liberalism and civil democracy

Two factors emerge from the connections between Blond's political philosophy and Milbank's articulation of Radical Orthodoxy. First, both Blond and Milbank share a deep-seated mistrust of unfettered liberalism and hold that, cut off from its Christian roots, British society has lost its moral compass and has been overtaken by materialist values, capitalism and economic liberalism. Second, they both advocate a hierarchically structured civil society within which positive, local network associations can thrive, common moral values and norms be established and democracy extended.

First, Blond's political philosophy highlights the tensions that exist between classical liberalism and neoliberalism, rooted as it is in the need to maintain both individuality and corporate (social) responsibility - how to find a sense of purpose in contributing to the wider society - without losing the sense of self. Both ordinary citizens and their philosopher kings, are called upon to sacrifice self-interest in pursuit of the greater good, contrary to the ideals of individual liberty and democracy that are central tenets of liberalism. This points to the complex question of the precise nature of modern liberalism, namely neoliberalism.

Thorsen and Lie's (n.d.) critique offers two interpretations of the term neoliberalism. At its most basic is the suggestion of a revival of liberalism, indicating a one-time absence from political policy-making and discussions, which has emerged in more recent times in reincarnated form. Alternatively, neoliberalism can be considered a distinct ideology in its own right, descending from, but not identical to, classical liberalism.

Furthermore, Crouch (2011, p.3-4), like Thorsen and Lie, points to a distinction between neoliberalism and economic liberalism, the latter emerging from classical liberalism at the end of the nineteenth century. Whereas economic liberalism represents a belief in unchallenged property rights, low levels of regulation and low taxes (*ibid*, p.6), classical liberalism sets an economy of many competing firms within a polity of many competing interests and with strict limits on the merging of economic and political interests (*ibid*, p.165). Drawing on the

development of liberalism over time, Crouch locates a fracturing of liberal ideas along the lines of social and economic interests. Liberalism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries emerged out of criticism against the combined powers of monarchs, aristocrats, popes and bishops. An alternative power base, however, was to be found in the commercial and later industrial wealth of the middle classes, who also sought freedom from the control of secular and religious authorities. By the nineteenth century, through the process of industrialisation, the property owning middle classes, themselves, became the objects of economic power and criticism. Workers looked for freedom from their dominance to a democratising state that would counterbalance middle class economic and commercial power. It was at this point that social and economic liberalism took their own paths in search of liberty: the former through the democratisation of property ownership, the latter via property ownership coupled with market transactions.

In Crouch's analysis, economic liberals found themselves allying with their old conservative enemies, in order to protect their authority and property ownership in the face of democracy. A democratic state, dominated by a property-less working class, threatened to oppose the separation between the economy and polity, central to both the concept of liberty and the efficient functioning of the market (*ibid*). The building of the Empire Hotel in Bath in 1901 by architect Major Charles Edward Davies is a visible example of this philosophy. The architecture of the roof depicts the three classes – a Castle on the corner for the upper class, a house for the middle class and a cottage for the poor. In principle, all three, provided they had the money to spend, were welcome within its doors. Like their classical liberal antecedents, economic liberals favoured *laissez-faire* economic policies, where state intervention is kept to the minimum. However, a further development in economic liberalism took place in Germany towards the end of World War II. *Ordoliberalismus* promoted a singular role for the state, in particular in its construction of the law in guaranteeing the effectiveness of market forces. It was this variation of economic liberalism that spread to the USA and became known as neoliberalism, to be developed and shaped by the Chicago school of economics and the particular influence of Milton Friedman.

In essence, neoliberalism looks to a proactive role for the state to promote the dominance of the market. Coupled with globalisation, it has encouraged the growth of large and powerful corporations and businesses that wield significant power and influence in political decision-making across the globe, extending the business model across a range of private sector institutions such as hospitals, schools, and universities. As wealth and power rise upwards, so inequalities multiply, the fundamental basis of both Milbank's and Blond's critiques.

Second, in criticising the effects of neoliberalism, neither Milbank nor Blond call for an egalitarian state but rather one based on secular and religious hierarchical structures. For Milbank, both hierarchy and elitism represent the indispensable ingredients of his politically stable civil society. Like Blond, he has a preference for the romantic socialists of the nineteenth century who grounded their criticisms in a moral critique of capitalism and sought to lead the masses in moral improvement (Coombs 2010, p.9). Milbank argues for a system of dual power, in which the church is not only strengthened but there is a blurring of boundaries between church and state, so as to bring the policies of the state in line with Christian practices (*ibid*). According to Doak (2007, p.373, cited in Coombs 2010), Milbank's desire to strengthen the power of the hierarchical institution of the church explains his reluctance to criticise the hierarchies of the secular domain. Both Blond and Milbank have called for a hierarchy of excellence, represented by the 'right kind of leaders' in power, in other words, those who can follow through the *Red Tory* agenda. 'The more we seek to link social and economic prestige with virtue, then the more we can hope for good financial and political leaders possessed of compassion and integrity' (Blond and Milbank 2010).

This revival of interest in the association of church and state is interesting at a time of secularism, religious scepticism, and aggressive atheism. The rise of the Christian church as a distinct institution, entitled to govern, can be charted back to the fourth century and the alliance of church and state under Constantine in the declining years of the Roman Empire. By this time, the church had grown strong, both in doctrine and in establishing an ecclesiastical infrastructure, making it a useful adjunct to the Empire. Here began a symbiotic relationship

that was to extend into the modern era. The church offered the state support, discipline, and the promise of civic obedience, whilst the state could nourish and protect the Church, including the purity of its doctrine. The Christian tradition, thus, suggested two classes of duties, spiritual and temporal. By the Middle ages, the Church offered legitimacy to the monarch rather than emperor, through the anointing with oil at the coronation and the order of law. In England, the appointment of the Archbishop of Canterbury is a consideration of parliament. Lords Temporal and Spiritual make up the upper house of the English Parliament.

Historically, the church's involvement in matters of state has been considerable. The church was largely responsible for extending a network of schooling to the poor, such that, the 1870 Education Act was able to establish compulsory primary education with minimal additional building and organisation. It was also involved in founding hospitals, poor houses, poor relief and lobbying for clean water, medical services and better food. The Church of England continues to exert political influence, for example, through the 'Faith in our Cities' report (General Synod 1985), the recent marriage debate, and the publication of its own report on the Big Society (Brown 2010).

Disraeli and Nineteenth century political thought

As well as the theological influences on Blond's political theory, *Red Tory* also makes explicit connections with a range of historical sources. Writers such as Cobbett, Carlyle and Ruskin make up a body of nineteenth century, romantic, conservative thought, that looked to the medieval age as a time when people cared for each other and none fell outside the care system. These authors, in Chapman's view, sought to align their different varieties of conservatism with historical tradition, care for the masses, and the alleviation of many of the miseries of modern society (Chapman 2012, p.284). Significant amongst these writers was the politician and author Benjamin Disraeli whose manifesto for the Young England Movement of the 1830s is set out in his trilogy of novels, *Conningsby*, *Sybil* and *Tancred*. The themes of history, social responsibility towards the poor and the role of institutions and the church in fulfilling these, are

explicit. The novels deal broadly with the character of political parties, the condition of the people and the duties of the church (O’Kell 1987, p.213). It was these writings that laid claim to one-nation Toryism, (a notion that has been enjoying something of a renaissance in current political thought) both Labour and Conservative claim to be the party of ‘one nation’

Of the three novels, *Sybil* deals with the condition of England, particularly the problem of poverty and social instability in a context of rapidly expanding industrialisation. Bratlinger, however, in critiquing *Sybil*, contends that the idea of Two Nations is a ‘dangerous illusion’ and was recognised as such by Disraeli (O’Kell 1987, p.214). The argument is that the poor are in no way a ‘united nation’ against the rich, but are rather a miscellany of quarrelling factions who were mistaken. The physical state of the people relates directly to their moral and spiritual condition. Responsibility for this decay lies with the Whig oligarchy of the eighteenth century and the liberalism of the nineteenth century Whig party, which held the political monopoly and whose policies, according to this analysis, threatened the integrity of the Empire and the greatness of England. Therefore, what is called for, is a regeneration of political and social responsibility; a revitalised Conservative party that will save the nation from disaster.

Indeed, it is Disraeli’s historical perspective that leads him to conclude that the proper representation of the people belongs to the aristocracy and the Church. Historic institutions embody the nation’s moral values and are, therefore, vital to social cohesion. His was a policy based on imperialism and social reform, underpinned by a belief in the preservation of the rights and liberties of a nation by its institutions (*ibid*). Disraeli’s is a theory of government based on the constructional balance of power. The House of Commons is not representative of the whole people as a nation, that role belongs to the sovereign. Leadership in England is best achieved by an hereditary aristocracy, an argument which has resonance with Burke’s belief in the stability of aristocratic institutions, as opposed to the innate restlessness of human nature. The value of the past is a constituent part of the present and informs political action.

Both liberals and conservatives accept change as inevitable, but, whereas liberals see change as progress towards something better, conservatives consider change as something to be tolerated only when it removes a specific evil. Caution and necessity make for considered change, making conservatism, therefore, an essential element of evolution. It was in this regard that Disraeli claimed the title of 'progressive' for the Conservative party, a designation hitherto adopted exclusively by the Liberals.

Thus, if Blond's political thesis rests on a nineteenth century anti-liberal argument and a call for a new conservatism based on pre-enlightenment ideals, then the current alliance of the Conservative and Liberal parties looks like a betrayal. However, it is Kelly's contention that the years following the First World War marked a serial decline in the Liberal party, with the consequence that liberal ideas needed to find a new political vehicle. The ascendancy of the Labour party of this period appeared to offer a solution, particularly for 'progressive, historical commentators' (Kelly 2012). However, for Kelly, the narrative that Liberals and Labour 'form a common progressive cause' (*ibid*), is misleading, and ignores the history of a complex relationship between liberalism and conservatism. It is this that will be explored in the next section.

Hayek, Oakeshott and Liberal Conservatism

In the twentieth century, ideological conservatism from Thatcher to Cameron has been swayed by two highly influential thinkers of the twentieth century, Oakeshott – a liberal who declared himself a conservative – and Hayek – a conservative who declared himself a liberal (*ibid*). Both Hayek and Oakeshott have been identified with the project of liberal conservatism to which Cameron is openly committed:

I am a liberal Conservative. Liberal, because I believe in the freedom of the individual to pursue their own happiness, with the minimum of interference from government. Sceptical of the state, trusting people to make the most of their lives, confident about the possibilities of the future—this is liberalism. And Conservative,

because I believe that we're all in this together—that there is a historical understanding between past, present and future generations, and that we have a social responsibility to play an active part in the community we live in. Conservatives believe in continuity and belonging; we believe in the traditions of our country which are embedded in our institutions. Liberal and Conservative. Individual freedom and social responsibility (Cameron 2007, cited in Lee 2009)

Kelly's contention is that both Hayek and Oakeshott were concerned with the complex relationship between liberal ideas and practice and conservative politics and policy. In the same manner that Milbank and Blond associated the liberal project with nihilism, so Hayek considered that the expansion of the state, under the auspices of providing greater freedom and opportunity, would lead to totalitarianism. Kelly's critique of Hayek draws out the importance of the role of tradition and convention in his favouring of free markets and the spontaneous order that emerges from the exercise of individual freedom and choice (Kelly 2012, p.27). Hayek distinguishes two kinds of order: a made order where order in society is based on a relationship of command and obedience and a spontaneous order, which no one consciously creates. These are '*taxis*' and '*cosmos*'. The former is valued in conservative thinking where rights and duties are clearly prescribed. This order is hierarchical and evidenced in organisations such as large businesses, and the Catholic Church. Where authority is exercised, it will be authoritarian, top-down and centralised. Hayek's objection is not to authoritarian organisations but the attempt to make society a single, authoritarian organisation (Gamble 1996, p.37). For Hayek, there must be order in society but this order should be *cosmos* not *taxis*. It was the transformation of the Conservative Party, from the mid-1970s to 1990s, that led to a resurgence of Hayekian liberalism, especially so, given that the overriding discourse of conservatism at the time was the freeing up of the economy (Kelly 2012, p.27). The spontaneous order of freedom and an open market society require tempering with conventional morality and legal moralism. It is for this reason, according to Kelly, that Hayek has an appeal to modern day social conservatives.

As with Hayek, so Michael Oakeshott is attributed with conjoining liberalism and conservatism in his philosophical writing and as such plays a central role in Jesse Norman's account of the Big Society. For Norman, Oakeshott is the greatest political thinker since Edmund Burke (Norman 2010, p.97). Oakeshott's political essays were brought together into two volumes *Rationalism in Politics* (1968), and *On Human Conduct* (1974). For Oakeshott, political theory and practice amounted to a conversation rather than an argument. Oakeshott described himself as a conservative, although he is also a major liberal thinker, who, for Kelly (2012, p.31), formed the basis for the recovery of a conservative voice in political theory. Oakeshott's conservatism represents a philosophical disposition rather than an ideological commitment and it was for this reason that he was able to combine liberalism and conservatism. His contention was that liberalism had lost any specific meaning and had become merely the terrain of political discourse. Conservatism is an approach, or attitude, to that terrain, so that the contrast is not so much between liberalism and conservatism, as between the rationalist and conservative (*ibid*), where rationalism seeks to reduce human experience to so many rules and principles, separating political and moral experience at a cost.

Oakeshott is a traditionalist and anti-rationalist. The major function of government is to adjudicate, or resolve, the conflicts that occur between citizens, borne out of consciousness of the world's imperfections. Here, there is resonance with Disraeli's understanding that citizens need protection from themselves. Morality offers a set of constraints, with moral behaviour describing acquiescence to such constraints. Knowing how to behave is a skill and involves a serious understanding of the end to which one's performance is directed, as well as one's part in that performance (Grant 1990, p.48). Therefore, 'knowing how' may also incorporate 'knowing that'. Here Oakeshott distinguishes practical and technical knowledge, the former being generated through experience in the manner of apprenticeship.

These assertions have implications for the understanding of tradition. Practice (tradition) is continuously passed from the skilled to the unskilled, is never fixed

and is constantly evolving. The individual is never a passive recipient of tradition but is transformed and extended by his own contribution to it. Indeed, without tradition, the individual would have no terms in which to express himself (*ibid*, p.49). The whole point about tradition is that it is dynamic and mobile. Change and the present are facts of life. The art of politics, therefore, is that of 'knowing where to go next in the exploration of an already existing traditional kind of society' (Oakeshott, cited in Grant 1990, p.60). Jesse Norman, for example has defended the prominence of ex-Etonians in government, claiming that other schools lack commitment to public service. Old-fashioned principles help Eton's students succeed. "Things like rhetoric and poetry and public speaking and performance are incredibly important to young people succeeding in life," (Norman 2013). Oakeshott's traditionalism demands that the politician, born into a political family and thus equipped with a 'feel' for politics, is the one to be entrusted with this task. Furthermore, he acknowledges that all citizens, in both their private and corporate activities, are engaged in 'the pursuit of intimations'. To this end, it is the role of government to facilitate the process, upholding and amending laws as necessary. In this way, government is not only a practice but acts as protector of all the diverse, self-chosen practices of the individuals who choose to pursue them (*ibid*, p.62).

Oakeshott's politics thus offer a merging of liberalism with conservatism. It is conservative in his respect of tradition with a liberal distrust of excessive government. His objections to socialism are a case in point, suggesting officiousness, incompetence and indifference or hostility to freedom (*ibid*, p.63). According to this analysis, socialism is the epitome of Rationalism. Governing is a limited activity and not concerned with moral right or wrong. A recent news report of GCHQ internet surveillance offers a case in point. Foreign politicians and officials who took part in two G20 summit meetings in London, in 2009, had their computers monitored and their phone calls intercepted on the instructions of the British government, according to press reports (McGaskall et al. 2013). This raises questions about the boundaries of surveillance by GCHQ and its American sister organisation, the National Security Agency. Access to phone records and internet data was defended as necessary in the fight against terrorism and serious crime.

Oakeshott's view of the neutrality of the state emerges from his model of civil association, which he distinguishes from enterprise association. In the former, life is organised around participation in a system of non-purposive or 'adverbial' rules. These constitute the opportunities and identities of the individual in a world alongside others (Kelly 2012, p.32). Such political association is inherent within European and British politics and is held in constant tension with enterprise association, where life, identity, and rule, are guided towards an external goal. These categories of association help define the nature of the state as a form of political association. Here Kelly suggests this distinction marks the difference between the conservative and the rationalist, but more significantly, that it indicates a liberal model of the state – impartial and neutral, one whose task is to tend and maintain the life of civil association, governed both by adverbial and constitutive (*law*) rules. It is in this regard, in bringing liberalism and conservatism together, in Kelly's analysis, that Oakeshott forms the basis of Norman's new-Conservatism and upon which, in his view, the Big Society is constructed.

The role of the State

Analysis of the intellectual foundations of both Blond's and Norman's theses of the Big Society indicate four dominant themes: history, tradition, moral values, and the relationship of the modern state to them, discussion that is strongly influenced by the writings of Burke and Hobbes.

Intellectual debt to Burke

Edmund Burke, political leader rather than political philosopher, and considered the 'father of conservatism', subscribed to a political creed that emerged from the seventeenth century conflict in England that culminated in the Glorious Revolution of 1688. The tension here was one between Whig conceptions of liberty and the law: liberty being freedom from arbitrary or ruthless coercion, whether emanating from the crown, parliament or the people and the law offering something permanent, uniform and universal (Raeder 1997). It was to this notion of freedom-under-law that Burke and later Hayek, subscribed.

According to Raeder, such views were closely associated with those of the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment such as Adam Ferguson, David Hume and Adam Smith, who conceived of society, its complex web of institutions, law, morals and customs, to be the culmination of a process of development from primitive society to high culture and civilization. Social institutions, therefore, were the product of a complex, historical process, cultivated through trial and error and an understanding of the constraints that preserve social order; hence Burke's high regard for the British constitution that encapsulated this notion of intricate evolution and defined his conservatism. Rationalism looked upon tradition as mere superstition and prejudice, which, therefore, demanded a reconstruction of traditional moral and legal rules based on selected ethical or legal frameworks, whereas, according to Burke's narrative, the social process and the historically evolved society were part of a wider, spiritual phenomenon, in which reason had only a limited role. For Burke, the preservation of free government and civilised society depends on the willingness to be governed by certain inherited rules of individual and collective conduct whose origins, function, and rationale may not be fully understood. They constitute a 'superindividual' wisdom, which transcends that available to the conscious, reasoning mind. Reason, therefore, is impotent to create a viable social order (*ibid*).

In terms of economics, Burke defended the free market and was opposed to the interference of government in the free enterprise system (*ibid*). Efforts to alleviate poverty should be left to private philanthropy rather than government involvement. Government's role, rather, was to maintain a coherent social order with the purpose of achieving a good and peaceful life. For Burke, the laws of commerce and economics were laws of nature and a manifestation of the Divine Law. There are similarities here with the writings of Locke and Hobbes, particularly in terms of concern for economic and physical well-being, however. Burke maintains respect for justice, natural superiority and Christianity as necessary for the 'science of government' (Radasanu 2011, p.24). Like Hobbes and Locke, Burke appreciates that the 'common good' is the product of activities that are not, of themselves, directed towards such a goal and therefore is not necessarily the outcome of just or virtuous actions on the part of citizens. Men

are primarily concerned with what is most immediately their own: that which makes them concerned with the general or common good does not come naturally but must be cultivated by stretching and enlarging self-interest as widely as possible. The common good can, however, be achieved through the careful manipulation of human nature. To this end, the prudent and wise statesman understands the raw material of politics – men, their passions, reason and habits. He cannot aim, therefore, at perfection, but must use whatever he has at his disposal for the sake of good public policy. This argument runs counter to the doctrine of the perfectibility of man, also rejected by Hayek and the Scottish School. For John Passmore (2000) the question of the perfectibility of man is both a philosophical and a theological question. He concludes that the answer depends, firstly, on the understanding of perfection – be that technical, moral, teleological – and, secondly, on the understanding of ‘man’ – as an individual or as a representative of mankind. Theologically, Christians would deny the perfectibility of man on earth for ‘all men have fallen short of the glory of God [Romans 3:23] (Holy Bible New International Version 2011) but ascribe ultimate and eternal perfection (being ‘without blemish and free from accusation’ [Colossians 1:21-22]) (*ibid*), to God’s grace through Jesus Christ. Given this Christian perspective of human nature, like Hobbes and Locke before him, Burke viewed the purpose of government as staving off the inconvenience of a pre-societal state where men were not well disposed to one another. His argument is based, not on the rights of man, but on utility. Men will not behave rationally or justly towards one another, even if revolution is for the sake of achieving such high ideals of rationality as justice reflected in equality for all. This is the role of government.

Burke’s science of government was one where the King, parliament and the people represent different centres of power, each working in tension and, thereby, helping to constrain one another. Government is a matter of practical know-how acquired over generations. It is not that government is dependent on the goodness of men but on the elevation of certain good men. People must guard their own liberty jealously and be aware of their value. Competing interests make for a healthy state of affairs, which forces individuals and groups to seek compromise. The ties that bind, - that love of city or country - begin at home. It is

through the family that individuals are attached to others. Trans-generational inheritance and family, therefore, act as an analogy for the political community, one that is organic and natural, the means of transmitting the inheritance of the constitution from generation to generation. Like the family, the constitution is a living and evolving treasure inherited by each generation. Respect is called for, for those venerable institutions that have survived over time, thereby proving their efficacy, whilst, at the same time, allowance is made for the gradual and piecemeal improvement of such institutions over time. They form the repository of a collective civilization and intelligence.

Burke's theory of representation looks back to the seventeenth century. He rejected the notion of a constituency as a numerical or territorial unit. He denied that individual citizens were represented and that numerical majorities have any significance in forming mature opinion. In this way, Burke was the founder of the modern party system (Radasanu 2011, p.19). Parliamentary government was conducted by a compact but public-spirited minority, which, in general, the country was willing to follow. Parliament was the place where leaders of this minority could be criticised and called to account by their party in the interests of the whole country. Once elected, the representative is responsible for the whole interest of the nation and empire. He owes to his constituents his best judgement, freely exercised, whether it matches theirs or not. Any serious statesman must have ideas about what sound public policy requires, must put policy into effect and seek the means so to do.

Eclectic nature of Conservatism

So far, this historical analysis of intellectual thought has highlighted the various political, philosophical, economic and theological strands, which, once woven together, attempt to depict Big Society ideas. What is clear is that these threads of thinking do not represent a single body of conservative thought but have roots in an ideological mix of liberal and conservative perspectives. There are obvious tensions here, which, of themselves, may account for the lack of clarity and purchase associated with the Big Society rebranding of party political Conservatism. Above all, in spite of the criticism of neoliberalism from a number

of notable sources, including Blond and Milbank, there is little engagement with the role capitalism has had to play in either the historical narratives, or its place in the new political and economic order that makes up the Big Society.

Capitalism

Capitalism represents an economic system in which wealth is owned by private individuals or businesses and where goods are produced for exchange, according to the dictates of the market. Capitalism emerged out of the industrial revolution in the West, where Fordist models of mass production technology became linked to rising wages and mass consumption. The increased demand for mass produced goods engendered confident and secure working class consumers. Rather than presenting a threat to capitalism they became a constituent part of it, enabling the expansion of the market and profit on an unprecedented scale (Crouch 2011, p.11).

The inevitable logic of capitalism is, of course, the accumulation of wealth. This means that those who wish to begin an enterprise of their own must seek to borrow from this accumulated wealth. It also means that within any capitalist system runs a deep seam of inequality. Of course, there is no one fixed model of organising capitalism, that of free market capitalism being only one. Chang (2010, p.253), for example, refers to American, Scandinavian, German and French models. Nor is capitalism, of itself, fixed. Foucault (1979, p.70), for example, refers to the constant presence of phenomena he called 'crises of capitalism' in the modern world. The most recent crisis being the global crash in 2008, considered the second largest economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s (Chang 2010, p.xiii). The response has been, not to turn away from free market economics, but to continue to espouse its value.

Announcing the Co-Operatives Bill enabling public sector workers to create mutuals to deliver public services, David Cameron, in 2012, returned to the concept of 'popular capitalism' which attempts to draw together notions of property ownership and social responsibility claiming a positive role for open markets and free enterprise;

"I believe that open markets and free enterprise are the best imaginable force for improving human wealth and happiness. They are the engine of progress, generating the enterprise and innovation that lifts people out of poverty and gives people opportunity.

"I would go further: where they work properly, open markets and free enterprise can actually promote morality. Why? Because they create a direct link between contribution and reward, between effort and outcome. The fundamental basis of the market is the idea of something for something – an idea we need to encourage, not condemn. So we should use this crisis of capitalism to improve markets, not undermine them."(Watt 2012).

Such ideas are grounded in the historical iterations of liberalism and conservatism through which can be traced the founding principles of the Big Society ideal. From Burke to Oakeshott, the tensions between state, politics and civil society have been laid bare, and the ideals of liberalism and neoliberalism in particular providing a constant presence. Whereas Phillip Blond argues for the Big Society as a response to the perceived evils of neoliberalism, others, such as Kelly and Norman, see its construction as a means of aligning conservatism and liberalism. Both offer limits and possibilities for the promotion of localism, small government and an active civil society that raise new questions about their anticipated role in the provision of state education. It is these questions that will be considered in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: English Education policy

If proponents of the Big Society have failed to engage with the part played by capitalism in the development of state and society, they are also silent about the role and contribution of education in this context. One way of addressing this, and making sense of their eclectic mix of philosophical and economic ideas, is to apply the optic of Oakeshott's political and educational philosophy to current Conservative Coalition education policy. Justification for this resides in the fact that Oakeshott (as demonstrated in the previous section) draws together conservative and liberal ideas, particularly about civil society, to which he applies his thinking about the nature and purposes of education at some length. His work was to have a profound influence on that of philosophers such as R.S. Peters and Paul Hirst, who, according to Williams (2007, p.11), have had an equally significant impact on education in their work during the 1960s on the definitions and nature of education and the curriculum.

O'Sullivan (n.d.) offers four, more specific, reasons for Oakeshott's relevance for the twenty-first century. First, and in contrast to his contemporaries, Oakeshott maintains a fundamentally positive and affirmative outlook on life and the positive, life enhancing benefits of teaching and learning (*c.f.* Williams 2007, p.227). Second, this positive and affirmative viewpoint is inseparable from his ideal of civilised living. Civility, he suggests, involves three important and closely related elements, which Oakeshott believes should be better understood. The civilised self is an educated self. Education, therefore, is a process of critical induction into the tradition of self-interpretation that constitutes a society's culture (O'Sullivan n.d., p.5). Civility also involves limits, both moral and civil.

The third justification for reading Oakeshott is his view of the role of the imagination in throwing into relief the texture and complexity of human existence. The imagination is far more than mere subjective flights of fancy. Rather, Oakeshott applies the use of the imagination found in the realm of literature to that of the world of facts, whilst recognising that this must be subject to different constraints. An author may apply the imagination to characters in terms of what seems plausible, whilst an historian brings into play his imagination in order to

make the historical evidence intelligible, thus demonstrating the importance of the imagination in understanding life itself. In the modern obsession for facts, for example, Oakeshott fears we have lost the ability to understand the true nature of historical enquiry. History is not only about explaining the past, but about discovering it (Nardin 2001, p.4). Positivist theories of historical explanation assume that historical enquiry aims to account for the occurrence of events whose meaning (character) is already known (*ibid*). But this is what the historian cannot assume. The historian can only *infer* past events on the evidence that has survived into the present. He or she must relate it to antecedent events, in order to illuminate its meaning according to the relationship the historian has identified. This is Oakeshott's idea of contingency. Historical inquiry both infers and constructs a past on the basis of evidence. This constructionist theory is a distinct mode of enquiry (*ibid*). It is in this manner that Oakeshott applies ideas of modality and contingency to identify the forms of inquiry best suited to understanding human activity.

Hence, the fourth and final reason posited by O'Sullivan (n.d., p.5) is Oakeshott's ideal of 'liberation', which practically links his philosophy to the personal life. Here, liberation is understood as a lifelong task of acquiring a distinctive self through critical immersion, rather than rejection of the culture from which one comes. It involves maintaining an active, rather than passive, identity (*ibid*, p.7), which links closely to Oakeshott's definition of liberal education as a means of liberating the learner into the realm of the imagination and ideas.

This is not to say Oakeshott's views are without criticism. His writings certainly raise questions and concerns about elitism and cultural imperialism insofar as he defends literary culture (Lawn 1996, p.276), as well as issues about access to education and inclusivity. Oakeshott's construct of liberal education was forged at a time when only a minority was fortunate enough to progress to post-compulsory level education studies. However, as Williams and others would argue, far from being elitist and exclusivist, Oakeshott was well aware of the inequalities in the educational opportunities of his day. He argued that the invitation to become educated should extend to all, irrespective of rank or status,

for: 'none of us is born human; each is what he learns to become' (Oakeshott 1975, p.24). Thus:

'To be initiated into this world is learning to become human; and to move within it freely is being human, which is an "historic," not a "natural" condition' (Oakeshott 1972, p.93).

In other words, education is not optional for the human being. Being human:

'is not merely his having to think, but his thoughts, his beliefs, doubts, understandings, his awareness of his own ignorance, his wants, preferences, choices, sentiments, emotions, purposes and his expression of them in utterances or actions which have meanings: and the necessary condition of all or any of this is that he must have learned it' (Oakeshott 1975, p.20).

This requires an inclusive curriculum so that all can join the conversation of mankind, which is not to be found in the vocational training (socialisation) so readily offered to the masses. It is this 'socialisation' that is excluding many from the benefits of a liberal education (Williams 2007, p.189). As Lawn (1996, p.267) argues, any conception of education that places training on a par with the quest for self-development, self-understanding and self-discovery, is incomplete.

This bifurcation of learning is indicative of Oakeshott's tendency to present arguments as an either/or dichotomy (Williams 2007, p.213) which, on first reading, appears to preclude other possibilities. However, his concerns about the culture of (government) control in education policy still have particular relevance in the current era of mass, compulsory education, where almost 50% of young people progress to higher education. So, too, his views on the essence and value of a liberal education, the nature of knowledge and the moral life, and the role of educational institutions, including Universities, in promoting such ideas, where the overall aim is the achievement of the autonomy or *Bildung* (*ibid*, p.13) of the individual. These issues will be discussed in what follows, before applying

Oakeshott's conceptual framework to the 2010 Coalition Government education policy.

In defense of liberal education

Oakeshott is a proponent of liberal education. For him, genuine education is of necessity liberal. Building on the nineteenth century tradition of liberal education articulated by the likes of Hegel, John Henry Newman, Matthew Arnold and John Stuart Mill, Oakeshott's philosophy of education, similarly, considers the context in which teaching and learning takes place as being set apart from the ordinary affairs of life. The curriculum, therefore, should not be subjugated to instrumental, utilitarian purposes, but followed for the enrichment it offers. It was John Stuart Mill who stressed that a liberal education is not restricted to cultivating the intellect alone. Rather, it also has a part to play in the moral and aesthetic aspects of learning. Whereas Mill would argue it is beyond the power of institutions, such as schools and universities to educate morally, given that such values are derived from the home and society, it is, however, the proper role of the university, and liberal education *per se*, to provide an overall interpretation of human experience (O'Sullivan 2011, p.7). Thus, for Oakeshott, the ultimate aim of a liberal education is to have some thoughts of one's own. Hence, learning in this way is able to liberate the learner into a world of imagination and ideas.

Kevin Williams's (2007) elucidation of the educational philosophy of Michael Oakeshott provides a detailed analysis of this body of work. For Williams, Oakeshott offers an elaborate narrative of what it is to be a learner and to learn. In order to learn, the individual must possess reflective consciousness and understanding. Indeed, a human being is a 'reflective consciousness', an agent making choices in an understood situation that he or she might attempt to alter (Nardin 2001, p.71). The outcome of learning is human conduct, as opposed to mere behaviour (a non-reflective manifestation of underlying biological or physical processes) which can be identified across all species. Whether acting impulsively or deliberately, human beings respond in a manner learned. Human learning, therefore, requires understanding which, in turn, is predicated on an understanding of the self and others. Self-understanding cannot be separated

from culture insofar as culture, for Oakeshott, is a 'conversational encounter' that has taken place through the ages, and is composed of 'feelings, perceptions, ideas, engagements, attitudes and so forth' (Fuller 1989, cited in Williams 2007, p.100). In this way, human conduct is seen as an exhibition of intelligence. The potential for personal development is, therefore, not fixed in the way physical development may be understood. Consequently, the role of the school is not about facilitating growth or maturation. Learning is more than this. Achievements in learning are achievements in becoming the kind of persons we are (*ibid*, p.16) and our identity is made up of what we have learned to think, feel, imagine and do.

Here, Oakeshott makes a clear distinction between practice and process. A process is causally determined and subject to measurement, whereas a practice cannot be measured. It is the context for all human action. Thus, each of our human practices, or modes, has a distinctive language, or living tradition, which determines our human actions. Experience in these modes is distinct from experience in the 'world of practice' (*ibid*, p.18) and serves to distinguish the world of ordinary affairs and desires from that of scholarly pursuits and experience.

Thus, Oakeshott makes a distinction between two forms of knowledge, technical and traditional (practical). Technical knowledge is present in every art, science or practical activity and in many such activities is reduced to rules which are, or may be, learned, remembered and put into practice. Practical knowledge, on the other hand, is unreflective and cannot be formulated into rules (Lawn 1996, p.270). These two forms of knowledge are inseparable, yet distinguishable and are the two components of knowledge in every human activity. It is a shared appropriation of the idea of tradition. There is no opposition between tradition and reason, for reason cannot be theorised. Practical reason springs from a living set of practices which, in turn, emerge from a history of practices or tradition (*ibid*, p.271).

Significantly, practical experience holds an element of moral conduct. Individuals come to recognise themselves as equal members of 'a community of selves'

(Oakeshott 1981, p.201). The practical is the mode in which we conduct most of our lives. This separation of the practical, as a mode of experience, from the scholarly, namely the modes of scientific, historical and aesthetic experience, is useful. If education developed from the practice of initiating young people into the skills of adult life, then the development of the school as an institution, and particularly since the introduction of compulsory schooling, represents the specific and deliberate practice of initiating young people into the aspects of their cultural inheritance (Williams 2007, p.19). It is the primary purpose of schooling to explore the modes of experience represented in the forms of knowledge and understanding (*ibid*). In this manner, educating demands a unique relationship between teacher and learner, one that is distinct from all other formal relationships such as buyer and seller, doctor and patient, lawyer and client. Education is liberal, according to this analysis, in that it is conducted in an arena that is free from intrusion by the demands of the language of practical activity; the 'language of appetite' (Williams 2009, p.41). It is also liberating or emancipatory in that it liberates from the grip of this language: it emancipates us from servitude to the world *sub specie voluntatis*, 'from the here and now of current engagements' (*ibid*, p.37). Thus conceived, liberal education is suitable for the cultivation of the liberal, or free human being. It is for personal enrichment and development.

However, for Oakeshott, this liberal view of education is not about promoting the pre-eminence of man such that man should take himself too seriously. O'Sullivan's (2011) view of Oakeshott's philosophy of education posits that Oakeshott has injected into the notion of liberal education an ideal of enlightenment: the 'philosophy of modesty'. The implications are for an enlightened education that permits life to be lived free from illusions about our relation to the world, society and ourselves; illusions that have led to feelings of absurdity, unthinking exploitation of nature and a foolish faith in state planning as the answer to all human misfortunes (*ibid*, p.11). For Oakeshott, therefore, education is not merely about learning to do 'this' or 'that' more proficiently but about acquiring, in some measure, an understanding of the human condition in which the 'fact of life' is continually illuminated by the 'quality of life' (Oakeshott 1972, p.26). It is about learning how to be both autonomous, and a civilized

human being. Education, seen in this light, has a higher goal than merely socialising the student into the prerequisites of the real world. Education should not simply replicate, but challenge the norms of society. The burden of creating truly human beings, therefore, rests on the whole of education, beginning within the family and extending through formal schooling and beyond. The question then arises as to what a state system of schooling should look like when viewed in this way.

Education as 'conversation'

One of Oakeshott's most significant contributions to the discussion of what is education is the concept of education as *conversation*. Oakeshott represents the process of 'School' as that serious and orderly initiation into an intellectual, imaginative, moral and emotional inheritance designed for children who are ready to embark upon it (Oakeshott 1972, p.24). The transaction between teacher and learner that follows, does not amount to the transfer of the products of earlier generations, a mere stock of ready-made ideas, images and beliefs such as might be found in the 2014 English National Curriculum (DfE 2013c), but rather it is about learning to look, listen, think and imagine. Education, thus understood, is about learning to recognise oneself as a human being. Learning becomes learning to study in conditions of direction and restraint and requires a teacher with something to impart, which is not immediately (or necessarily) connected with the current wants or 'interests' of the learner. 'School' is about an engagement to learn by study that demands effort. What is learned has to be understood and remembered.

This construct of 'School' offers emancipation through a continuous redirection of attention. The learner is animated, not by his own inclinations, but by intimations of excellence and aspirations he has never yet dreamed of. The teacher, thus, embodies some part, or aspect of this inheritance, in whom it is 'alive'. In this manner, Oakeshott would find the notion of an ignorant teacher a contradiction. The teacher, by necessity, is the master of that which he/she teaches. He, or she, has deliberated its worth and the manner in which it is to be imparted to the learner who is known. The suggestion that education is something that is

'delivered' or scripted, as is in the National Literacy and Numeracy strategies of the past (DfEE 1998, 1999) or intervention programmes such as the Early Literacy Support Programme (DfES 2001) would be anathema. For Oakeshott, the teacher is a custodian of that 'practice' in which the inheritance of human understanding survives, and is perpetually renewed. The mark of a good school is that it bestows on its former pupils the gift of a childhood recollected as an enjoyed initiation into the mysteries of the human condition; the gift of self-knowledge and of a satisfying intellectual and moral identity, rather than one that meets predetermined targets and high positions in league tables.

Universities: learning to live or learning to work

As already indicated, Oakeshott makes a distinction between the aims of liberal education and those of a vocationally orientated system of education. His fear is that the latter has dominated education provision, and where once this might have been designed for the poor in industrialised society, it has now extended to all social classes (Williams 2007, p.105). This has been exacerbated by increasing state control of education. Oakeshott's attempts to keep these two domains of liberal and vocational education separate, serve two purposes. First, in order to protect the virtue of school and university education according to Oakeshott's liberal understanding of the education project. Second, to detach from the world of work those concepts of satisfaction, fulfilment and the development of autonomy that pertain to 'School'. But this, William's argues, is an example of Oakeshott's over economy of concepts. Work, indeed, can contribute to a person's autonomy, both practically, in that it enables individuals to be economically self-supporting, but also in terms of the more philosophical concept of *Bildung*. For many, work can be a source of immense enjoyment and fulfilment. The question remains, how far school and university should be subjugated to this aim alone, especially given Oakeshott's singular view of the nature of 'School' outlined below.

Exclusivity, elitism or equality of opportunity?

School is the institutional setting for initiation into Oakeshott's 'conversation of mankind' and is distinguished from other educational institutions that promote vocational training, community centres or distance/e-learning opportunities.

[T]here is no substitute for the school as a specific institution where, in personal transaction, a young person is initiated by a teacher into the language of human understanding' (Williams 2007, p.47).

There is, however, a distinction in Oakeshott's writing between the 'idea "School"' and the reality of schools, the former representing the virtues, as opposed to the vices, of 'school'.

In stressing the set-apart nature of school, school as a sanctuary, a community, engendering loyalty and happy memories, which for some may be indicative of the ideal English public school, Oakeshott has been criticised for advocating an exclusive idea. Williams argues this is far from Oakeshott's desire. The type of schooling described is intended for all learners, irrespective of background and aptitude. Although a formal curriculum may be the core business of school, it is not its only business. Building confidence, opening up a variety of opportunities and experiences, are to name but a few. Yet Williams argues that Oakeshott views too negatively the necessity for state involvement in the education system, and the likely subversion of the ideal of 'School' to meet economic and instrumental purposes. 'The law of the market and the vagaries of philanthropy are unlikely to assure the full benefits of education, or health care to the population at large (*ibid*, p.63), hence state intervention is one way of ensuring access to educational goods, especially to those facing socio-economic disadvantage.

It may also be considered that Oakeshott's philosophy of the curriculum, that orderly programme of studies based on the languages of human understanding and art, (*ibid*, p.65) is elitist. The curriculum is intended for the initiation of young people into these languages. Primarily, Oakeshott's curriculum consists in the

traditional literature, languages, history and science. There is no need to assume these languages are to be narrowly conceived and should not reflect the diversity of cultures and voices of local communities, nor does this have to be at the expense of the traditional elements of the school curriculum *per se*.

For Williams, Oakeshott is well aware that, historically, the poor have not enjoyed educational equality and he deplores their exclusion from the curriculum of high culture for the sake of 'socialisation' - that instruction in vocationally oriented skills designed to accommodate the masses, who were, because of their poverty, excluded from any education at all (*ibid*, p.189). Socialisation stands as a misguided, alternative apprenticeship to adult life' (*ibid*), that cannot provide access to the educational conversation. But if Oakeshott's ideal of liberal education should be accessible to all, he fails to take note of the barriers to success presented by limited socio-economic means, such that the higher the educational level, the greater the disparities in rates of educational participation relative to origins (*ibid*, p.192). This is further complicated by Oakeshott's philosophy of civil and enterprise association, and his belief that the concern of government is with the protection and promulgation of law. It has no function in the distribution of material goods, otherwise the state would become an enterprise, rather than civil, association. Williams overcomes this by arguing that, given government is the custodian of the law, the distributive principle can be extended through the tax system. This is particularly so in terms of access to education, and the exercise of full citizenship. Where this may be undermined by economic deprivation, Williams argues that Oakeshott's view of the civil life is compatible with the notion of social democratic interventionism that permits both access to education and the exercise of citizenship, in its fullest sense. This Williams views as both participative and active in the spirit of most western democracies.

The role of the state - intervention, standards and assessment

'The culture of control in education engendered a strand of pessimism in Oakeshott's thought and it continues to prompt concern in the minds of many educators in the twenty-first century' (Williams 2007, p.221). Oakeshott was

concerned that education had become an instrument of manipulative social engineering, supported by the 'science' of behaviourism, to realise the purposes of the state (*ibid*). Williams argues that the impulse of the positivism which began in the Enlightenment, was designed to control nature. However, the positivism that developed in the 1950s, and became a pillar of educational policy in the 1980s (and beyond), was intended to bring education institutions under the control of government and employers. What has developed, in the words of Standish (2005 cited in Williams 2007, p.222), is a practice of teaching based on a 'closed economy' of pre-defined aims, objectives and outcomes, subject to repeated quality audits. What is valued in education becomes what is measurable, and the excited babble of the 'conversation of mankind' slowly becomes inaudible against the white noise of targets and assessments. This is not to say that there is no role for standards and assessment regimes. Williams has argued for state involvement in ensuring equality of educational access and for exercising a redistributionist role through the taxation system. He also suggests that, internationally, there are examples of state funded schooling that provide the very type of liberal education Oakeshott espouses. Where schooling and university education is funded through taxation, it is only right that such institutions are held accountable for the monies they use. This, however, does not have to be at the expense of the liberal educational ideal aspired to. For Oakeshott, the concern was for a state intent on social engineering through intervention. This, he feared, would result in the 'abolition of mankind', an alarmism which Williams regards as both understandable and exaggerated (*ibid*); a view based on a belief in the achievement of committed teachers to rise above such reductionist trends, in order to preserve a respect for the human person, and a delight in learning, in order to join the conversation of mankind.

Thus, Oakeshott's relevance to current education debate and policy-making is evident for a number of reasons. It provides an holistic understanding of what it is to be human, the nature of civilised living, the contribution of education in its broadest sense, and of schooling in particular, to the development and sustainability of both. Rather than being narrowly conceived, schooling should extend beyond the passing down of facts or preparation for the world of work and contribute to the making of 'man'. There are, consequently, significant

implications here for the teaching profession, teacher training, the system of state schooling and higher education provision, and the type of formal curriculum on offer. It is these areas that will be discussed next in relation to the 2010 Coalition Government's education policy, the analysis of which, using Oakeshott's conceptual framework, will help uncover the tensions between liberal and conservative political ideologies at work in the construction of the education policy led by the then Secretary of State, Michael Gove.

Coalition Education Policy 2010-2014

Education featured as the first and most urgent arenas for change for the new Conservative Coalition government of May 2010. Indeed, the renaming of the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to the more traditional Department for Education (DfE), was to signal a break with New Labour and its overtly holistic approach to education and social policy, encapsulated in the Every Child Matters agenda (DfES 2003) and the Children Act (HMG 2004). No longer did 'every child *matter*' so much as 'every child [was to] *achieve more*' (Puffet 2010).

Published in November 2010, *The Case for Change* (DfE 2010a) outlines the rationale behind the radical changes detailed in the accompanying government White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE 2010b). The overall narrative begins with an assertion that [English] schools can 'be better'. This is based on evidence from the OECD and international comparison tables such as PISA, which place English pupils behind their contemporaries in Finland, Hong Kong and Canada. Three key lessons define the English 'problem'; these relate to the recruitment and quality of teachers, limited school and teacher autonomy and the persistence of the attainment gap between the highest and lowest performing pupils.

In order to improve England's ranking, an immediate raising of educational standards, coupled with a drive to narrow the attainment gap is called for. This is endorsed, not only as a means of tackling economic inequality (better educated pupils will achieve better jobs), but, because it will also address changes in the

types of employment and skills-base created by new technologies and the wider global economy: better educated pupils will fit the new employment profiles demanded by such technologies. Schools would, therefore, require greater professional autonomy in order to promote the innovation necessitated by these changes. All this rests on the nature and quality of teachers, considered 'the most important feature of a successful education system' (DfE 2010a, p.6). To this end, three key strategies are proposed as the means of enhancing the quality of the teaching profession: a focused recruitment of 'high quality' candidates for teaching, improvement to initial teacher training and induction, and the enhancement of systems for continuing professional development. These strategies underpin the comprehensive changes to state education outlined in the White Paper (DfE 2010b), and validated in the 2011 Education Act (HMG 2010a).

The teaching profession

Centre stage amongst these reforms, is a reconceptualisation of the significance and quality of teachers in the transformation of the English state education system. The preamble to the *Teachers' Standards* (DfE 2010b) reads:

Teachers make the education of their pupils their first concern, and are accountable for achieving the highest possible standards in work and conduct. Teachers act with honesty and integrity; have strong subject knowledge, keep their knowledge and skills as teachers up-to-date and are self-critical; forge positive professional relationships; and work with parents in the best interests of their pupils. (*ibid*, p.10)

Recruitment and Quality

Policy changes, intended to improve the quality and status of teachers, and outlined in the White Paper, require:

- that new entrants to teacher training have a minimum of a 2:2 degree;
- a re-orientation of teacher training to focus more on classroom skills;

- that trainees spend more time in schools;
- the development of Teaching Schools to lead the training and professional development of teachers in a similar manner to Teaching Hospitals;
- an expansion of Teach First (initial teacher training based on the Teach America model offered through private providers); *and*
- the development of new and compressed routes into teaching for career changers and persons leaving the armed forces.

(Morris 2012, p.98)

Furthermore, the *Case for Change* (DfE 2010a, p.7) sets out identifiable, pre-professional characteristics of the 'good teacher'. These are:

- A high overall level of literacy and numeracy
- Strong interpersonal and communication skills
- A willingness to learn; *and*
- The motivation to teach (Allington & Johnson (2000) cited in (DfE 2010a, p.7)

Such prerequisites allow for the widening of teacher recruitment beyond what has become an accepted focus on successful personnel from industry and commerce. Troops to Teaching, for example, is a flagship policy aiming to recruit newly retired or redundant service men and women to the teaching profession, bringing with them strong traditions of team work, discipline and commitment, along with high levels of technical expertise in priority subjects such as Mathematics and the sciences.

The *Teachers' Standards* (DfE 2010b) describe the minimum requirements of all members of the teaching profession, from trainee to experienced teacher. These are listed as: professional values and behaviours; standards for teaching; and standards for professional and personal conduct. They include statements such as 'demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge' (*ibid*, p.7), 'uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethos and

behaviour, within and without school' (*ibid*, p.10), 'maintain high standards in their own attendance and punctuality' (*ibid*).

Initial teacher training and CPD

Changes to initial teacher training involve opening the delivery of teacher training to private providers with the aim of a model of training that is more classroom-based and less theoretical (DfE 2010a, p.7). School-centred initial teacher training (SCITTS) and 'Schools Direct', provided through a consortium of schools and partner education providers, are examples here. So too, Teach First, a private, social enterprise, linked to Teach America as part of the Teach for All network. Each of these models still involves collaboration with a partner university but in essence, the new arrangements serve, principally, to break the monopoly of Higher Education in teacher training provision. Ultimately, the development of the Teaching Schools programme would mean that 'alliances' of such schools would 'take a structured and proactive role in leading, managing and taking responsibility for, a school-led ITT system' (NCTL 2014a).

Furthermore, teaching school alliances and their 'strategic partners', including universities, academy chains, private sector, diocese or local authorities, were to take a lead in the continuing professional development of the school workforce, from head teacher to teaching assistant (NCTL 2014b). Thus, the advisory role of local authorities was all but removed. Expertise was to rest with a system of school-to-school-support (system leadership models) and private providers, overseen by the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL).

The state system of schooling

These wholesale changes to the recruitment, training and deployment of teachers, were mirrored by an equally radical reform of the state system of education, from the nature and diversity of maintained schools, to the body of knowledge enshrined in the curriculum and the accumulated powers held by the Secretary of State. Gove's reforms of the teaching profession argued for returning greater professional autonomy, both to teachers, and to schools. Since 1988, all maintained schools in England had to adhere to the newly introduced

National Curriculum and to employ state qualified, graduate teachers. However, in the few years following the 2010 election, there was a steadily growing number of state schools released from this prescription, namely Academies and Free schools.

The Academies Act (HMG 2010a) was central to the Government's school reforms, and was enacted with astonishing speed, receiving Royal Assent on 27th July. It represents the primary mechanism through which levels of parental choice and competition were to be raised in the system of state maintained school. Academies, already established under New Labour, are state funded, yet self-governing and outside of direct local authority control. The 2010 Act was to radically extend the scope of New Labour's academies programme, permitting all existing state schools, whether primary or secondary and subject to certain criteria, to apply for Academy status. Furthermore, all new maintained schools were to be set up as an Academy or Free school. Free Schools, are 'all-ability state-funded schools set up in response to what local people say they want and need in order to improve education for children in their community' (DfE 2013a) and strongly influenced by the Swedish programme of the same name. They may be set up by parents, teachers, charities, businesses, and religious groups without the support from an existing school or local authority. As such, they are 'free' insofar as they enjoy a certain measure of autonomy in that they are not subject to the same day-to-day control over their activities as other maintained schools, as in the case of Academies generally. Twenty-four Free Schools opened in 2011 and a further fifty-five in 2012.

Historical background

The seeds of Academy and Free School reforms are evident amongst all three of the main political parties in England. In the 1980s the Conservative government experimented with City Technology Colleges (CTC) introduced in order to improve schooling in inner-city areas by bringing private enterprise into the state system. Secondary phase CTCs were free from Local Authority control and received capital funding from private businesses which were often represented on the governing body. They were obliged to follow the national curriculum

introduced in the same 1988 Act but all had to have a specialism in a particular area of technology such as information technology (ICT).

The CTC programme was adopted and changed by the Labour Government of 1997 under the steering of the Education Secretary David Blunkett. Blunkett's introduction of a programme of City Academies was to form part of a wider programme of reforms to extend diversity within the publicly-funded sector and raise standards where existing provision was considered inadequate (Blunkett 2000, p.21-2). The programme permitted the establishment of new public sector schools, allowed private schools to convert to the public sector and encouraged new promoters from voluntary, religious or business sectors to challenge or replace weak schools (*ibid*). Again, such schools operated outside local authority control. Coalition school policy represents a wholesale renovation of this model of academies, extensively transforming the landscape of the English system of state maintained schools.

Chains and federations

Withdrawal of local authority control and greater autonomy in terms of admissions and funding arrangements has facilitated the grouping of schools into new forms of networks, federations or alliances for a variety of purposes. Prior to the emergence of Academies, there were no school 'chains' within the state education system, now names such as ARK, The Harris Federation and the United Learning Trust are synonymous with the Academy project. These have absorbed onetime local authority responsibilities, such as school improvement and advisory roles, perhaps bringing closer to fruition the notion of a school-led system of education, responsive to local need. One key example here would be that of the London Challenge and later City Challenge initiative (Hutchings *et al.*, 2012), a collaborative exercise in school leadership, with a particular focus on school improvement, which appeared to successfully counter the stratification of local school systems that marketisation and competition between schools had brought in its wake. Indeed, the *Case for Change* (DfE 2010a, p.20) sets out the contention that the most effective systems combine high levels of school autonomy with effective accountability. Drawing on international comparison data

from the OECD, the assertion is that 'A system in which schools are free to decide how things should be done and are then accountable for the results, appears to be the most effective in raising achievement' (*ibid*).

Interest in the twin concepts of autonomy and accountability has grown in recent decades, albeit in response to different underlying forces that have bridged the three dominant political parties in England (Glatter and Young 2013). The Local Management of Schools (LMS) introduced in the Conservative government's Education Reform Act, 1988, gave individual schools (headteachers and governors), rather than local authorities, enhanced budgetary responsibilities. The Act also offered further opportunities for autonomy from local authority control in the creation of City Technology Colleges (CTCs) and Grant Maintained Schools funded directly from Whitehall. Yet, such autonomy for schools came at a cost, for, together with the introduction of a highly prescribed national curriculum, in reality this amounted to greater centralisation. In the new marketised system, schools became accountable to a number of stakeholders; governors, parents, government and, in the case of CTCs, private funders. Ofsted, introduced in 1993, was responsible for measuring school standards, underlining the assumed link between enhanced autonomy and school improvement, although Secretary of State, Michael Gove, expressed dissatisfaction with this independent body, considering it unfit for purpose (The Guardian, 2014). Glatter and Young (2013, p.563) refers to this array of reforms as amounting to the nationalisation of schooling, making schools more uniform rather than encouraging greater diversity. What followed under New Labour - 1997-2010 was a continuation of these tendencies towards centralisation, a movement that has gained significant momentum under the Conservative Coalition and compounded by increased powers vested in the Secretary of State.

Powers of the Secretary of State

Throughout the whole process of reform, the powers vested in the Secretary of State for Education have accumulated significantly. The Education Bill of 2011 listed fifty new powers, including powers to intervene directly where schools are

under-performing and the ability to direct what types of schools communities should have (DfE 2011; Burnham 2011; Wolfe 2013).

The Curriculum

The framework for the new National Curriculum in England was published in September 2013 to come into effect in September 2014. Some of the changes were to be staged such as those affecting pupils in year 2 or 6 who will be assessed according to the old Standard Attainment Test (SATs) measures.

According to the DfE:

The national curriculum provides pupils with an introduction to the essential knowledge that they need to be educated citizens. It introduces pupils to the best that has been thought and said; and helps engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement (DfE 2013c, p.6).

It was to be taught alongside the school curriculum which:

promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society, and prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life. The school curriculum comprises all learning and other experiences that each school plans for its pupils (ibid, p.5).

The rationale given for the proposed reforms to the curriculum and to the public examination system is found in Michael Gove's speech to the Social Market Foundation (Gove 2013). Claiming affinity with the writings of Antonio Gramsci and E. D. Hirsch, Gove argued the case for a new curriculum '[s]o that more time - much more time - is available for teaching, for reading around the subject, *'and for the cultivation of the habits of proper thought'* (ibid). This offer is to be accessed through a menu of twelve traditional subjects and disciplines, organised as 'core' (English, Mathematics and Science) and 'foundation subjects' (Art & Design, Citizenship, Computing, Design & Technology, Languages, Geography, History, Music and Physical Education) across four key

stages. '[O]ur new curriculum affirms - at every point - the critical importance of knowledge acquisition' (*ibid*). In other words, a linear national curriculum based on essential knowledge imparted by teachers. By Key Stage 4, there is a clear demarcation between the academic and technical in the restructured GCSE programme with the removal of 'soft' subjects such as PE, media and drama from the GCSE brand (Paton 2011). This division between the academic and practical, Core and Foundation subjects, perpetuates and institutionalises the abiding legacy of the elementary school system of the past.

Analysis of reforms

The unifying factor across all these reforms is *teaching*. *Teaching*, rather than *teachers*, is the chosen driver for change, hence the title of the 2010 White Paper: *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE 2010b). What is to be taught, by whom, to whom, where and for what purpose, denotes Gove's underlying philosophy of education. This contrasts sharply with Oakeshott's philosophy of 'School' and the role of the teacher in the teacher/pupil relationship.

Conceptualising pedagogy

The nature of teaching is closely determined by the presumed purposes of education, and more specifically by the intended outcomes of the curriculum, in current education policy. Indeed, Hinchcliffe (2001, p.31) makes a clear distinction between 'pedagogy' understood as instrumental learning placed at the service of government, political power or the economy and 'education', 'that more disinterested endeavour in which teacher and learner engage in a form of enquiry'. Whereas the former is guided by specific objectives, the latter takes an open-ended view of the outcome of education - an outcome that should be left, in part, to the interaction between teacher and learners, as in the case of a conversation. For Hinchcliffe, this means that, constructed as education, learning cannot be measured by a common standard, whereas, if constructed as pedagogy, the outcomes have to be measured, given that the whole point of learning is to equip learners for specified social, political and economic functions.

A view that takes education and pedagogy as polar opposites is, perhaps, unhelpful. A more sophisticated understanding of these concepts is called for.

According to Michael Gove:

Teaching is a craft and it is best learnt as an apprentice observing a master craftsman or - woman. Watching others, and being rigorously observed yourself as you develop, is the best route to acquiring mastery in the classroom. (DfE 2010b).

What Gove presents here is a particular understanding of pedagogy - teaching as a 'craft' (Brown & McIntyre 1993) but which can also be categorised as an 'art' (Eisner 1979) or 'science' (Simon 1981) of teaching. Alexander (2004, p.10), in a similar vein to Hinchcliffe, argues that such definitions offer a restricted view of pedagogy, one that 'excludes any sense of how pedagogy connects with culture, social structure and human agency, and acquires educational *meaning*'. This model of pedagogy relates more closely to Friere's (1972) notion of 'banking' rather than Oakeshott's notion of conversation.

UK emphasis on curriculum - pedagogy subsidiary to curriculum

For Alexander, restricted notions of pedagogy represent:

judgement rather than substance and justification; and with teaching rather than the wider sphere of morally purposeful activity, of which teaching is a part, which we call education. Teachers, in this characterisation, are technicians who implement the educational ideas and procedures of others, rather than professionals who think about these matters for themselves (Alexander 2004, p.12).

As an alternative, Alexander (*ibid*, p.11-12) offers a typology of pedagogy which addresses such concerns. This constitutes a number of domains and values. His first grouping relates to what is to be taught, to whom and how, in other words those domains which *enable* teaching:

children: their characteristics, development and upbringing

learning: how it can best be motivated, achieved, identified, assessed and built upon;

teaching: its planning, execution and evaluation; and

curriculum: the various ways of knowing, understanding, doing, creating, investigating and making sense which it is desirable for children to encounter, and how these are most appropriately translated and structured for teaching.

The second grouping acknowledges that teaching takes place in a context and responds to requirements and expectations. These comprise:

school: as a formal institution, a microculture and a conveyor of pedagogical messages over and above those of the classroom; and

policy: national and local, which prescribes or proscribes, enables or inhibits what is taught and how.

It is here that teaching is *formalised* and *legitimated*. Finally are the domains of:

culture: the web of values, ideas, institutions and processes which inform, shape and explain a society's views of education, teaching and learning, and which throw up a complex burden of choices and dilemmas for those whose job it is to translate these into a practical pedagogy;

self: what it is to be a person, an individual relating to others and to the wider society, and how through education and other early experiences selfhood is acquired; and

history: the tool for making sense of both education's present state and its future possibilities and potential.

These serve to *locate* teaching in time, place and the social world. It anchors teaching firmly to questions about human identity and social purpose

Applying this typology, it is possible to explore Conservative Coalition education policy in the light of Oakeshott's philosophy of 'education'.

Learning

Learning is mentioned 46 times in the *Importance of Teaching*, primarily as part of the phrase 'teaching and learning' but also in terms of what should be learnt (knowledge) by pupils, teachers and Government in relation to international comparisons. At no point is there any indication of an overriding theory of learning beyond a call for 'deep learning' (DfE 2010b, p.40) and 'synoptic learning' (*ibid*, p.49), neither of which are defined. The whole process for improving teaching and learning would, therefore, appear to be unsystematic and pluralistic, in that individual schools can develop their own approaches to learning, acknowledging, at the same time, that the outcomes of such processes are assessed through a centralised and prescriptive model of accountability in the form of Ofsted inspections.

We envisage schools and teachers taking greater control over what is taught in schools, innovating in how they teach and developing new approaches to learning. We anticipate that in a school system where Academy status is the norm and more and more schools are moving towards greater autonomy, there will be much greater scope for teachers to design courses of work which will inspire young minds. But there will still be a need for a national benchmark, to provide parents with an understanding of what progress they should expect, to inform the content of the core qualifications and to ensure that schools which neither wish, nor have the capacity, to pursue Academy status have a core curriculum to draw on which is clear, robust and internationally respected (*ibid*, p.40).

The Case for Change (DfE 2010a) is equally silent on any underlying theory of learning that may underpin professional practice. What is to be encouraged is the sharing of 'best practice'; teacher autonomy, in providing appropriate 'learning environments'; and accountability measures that monitor teaching and learning as part of the inspection process. It would appear from this that the proposed reforms are not explicitly supported by any generally accepted theories

of child development or teaching and learning. In other words, there is no sense in which 'education' or even pedagogy in its broadest sense, has any part. Rather, what is presented is a consistently narrow and instrumental view of teaching and learning, where teaching is presented as a craft, grounded in classroom experience. The transfer of teacher training from institutions of Higher Education into schools only serves to reinforce this model.

Yet for Oakeshott, education has more to do with learning for its own sake. Oakeshott's concept of a practice makes the distinction between education and pedagogy decisive. Learning construed as pedagogy, relates to instrumental practice or 'prudential art'. Those who join together in pursuit of a common want, or to promote a common interest, form what Oakeshott refers to as an enterprise association. But there is another form of practice in Oakeshott's armoury - the practice of agency. This, unlike the enterprise association, has no 'extrinsic, substantial purpose' and is typified by a 'morality' or 'open practice' where agents themselves subscribe to the terms of the practice. Education, according to this analysis, belongs to 'open practice' and initiates the learner (or agent) into an understanding of those terms (Hinchcliffe 2001, p.40-42). Learning to understand the rules of a practice is therefore, by necessity, self-reflective and tied, inextricably, to human conduct. Oakeshott's desire to see education as separate and uncorrupted by instrumental purposes is, perhaps, unfortunate, for education historically has never been free from the instrumental purposes imposed by either church or state. Perhaps the purest form of learning, therefore, should be served by both 'pedagogic' and 'educational' purposes.

Teaching

On first reflection, current education policy depicted in both *The Case for Change* and *The Importance of Teaching* errs heavily on the side of instrumentalism. This is evidenced not only in the representation of learning but also in its understanding of teaching and the teaching profession.

At the heart of our plan is a vision of the teacher as our society's most valuable asset. We know that nothing matters

more in improving education than giving every child access to the best possible teaching. There is no calling more noble, no profession more vital and no service more important than teaching. [.....]we believe in the importance of teaching – as the means by which we liberate every child to become the adult they aspire to be [....] The importance of teaching cannot be over-stated (DfE 2010b, p.7).

The ‘importance of teaching’ rests on the notion of teacher and school autonomy. An autonomous teacher is one freed from the burdens of an over prescriptive set of standards and curriculum orders, and is able to make professional decisions about what is best. However, of the 36 times autonomy is mentioned in the White Paper on only two occasions is it used explicitly in relation to head teachers and teachers, and once obliquely to ‘the front line’. According to the OECD (*ibid*, p.3), it is countries which give the most autonomy to head teachers and teachers that do best and the best performing and fastest improving school systems have achieved their envied status through combining high levels of teacher and school autonomy with rigorous accountability measures (*ibid*, p.18). Indeed no education system can be better than the quality of its teachers (*ibid*, p.3) and the status of teaching depends on strengthening the authority of teachers in the classroom. Good quality teaching depends on good quality teachers, hence an emphasis on the recruitment and training of teachers. Reference is made to the importance of teaching reading, systematic synthetic phonics and mathematics, of teaching schools and teaching assistants. Yet, despite great emphasis on the importance of teaching, as in the case of learning, there is no underlying theory or theories of teaching or pedagogy. Key elements of teaching are listed as:

the best approaches to the teaching of early reading and early mathematics, how best to manage poor behaviour, and how to support children with additional needs, including Special Educational Needs (*ibid*, p. 26),

but again, without any explanation of what these may look like beyond a statement that:

skilled and precise assessment of pupils' work – both of the level at which children are working and of what they should be learning next – is an essential part of good teaching.

Indeed, any implicit or explicit reference, to the planning, execution and evaluation of teaching is missing. There is much, on the other hand, about the rigorous accountability of teachers and assessment of pupils.

Again, what is presented here is precisely that restricted model of pedagogy which has reduced teaching to a craft predicated on a set number of skills. There is nothing here that would point to the higher aims of education as espoused by Oakeshott. For, it is the nature of the teacher /pupil relationship that moves teaching beyond imparting certain facts and types of knowledge to the pursuit of 'education' proper. Both teaching and learning converge in Oakeshott's metaphor of 'Conversation'.

There is a clear distinction in the writings of Oakeshott between teaching as imparting and teaching as instruction. Instruction is the passing on of certain facts and information; 'teaching that', or what Oakeshott has referred to as 'drilling' suggesting verbal and non-verbal routines of a mechanical, nature. Imparting, on the other hand, has to do with the communication of judgement. Judgement here is not abstract and cannot be reduced to so many propositions learned apart from the practical skill to which it belongs. The role of the teacher then is that of exemplar, suggesting an apprenticeship model of learning at the feet of the master. The master provides him with an 'opportunity not only to learn the rules, but to acquire also a direct knowledge of how he sets about his business (and, among other things, a knowledge of how and when to apply the rules)' (Oakeshott 1981 cited in Williams 2007, p.162).

The teacher pupil relationship is therefore complex and hinges on questions of values and knowledge, what is to be taught and how.

Curriculum

In a school system which encourages a greater degree of autonomy and innovation the National Curriculum will increasingly become a rigorous benchmark, against which schools can be judged rather than a prescriptive straitjacket into which all learning must be squeezed (DfE 2010b, p.10).

The curriculum, as interpreted here, clearly has more to do with *standards* and less about knowledge or teaching and learning. This becomes a question *values*.

The recent review of the National Curriculum has been the third produced since 2009. Both the Rose Review (DCSF 2009) and the Cambridge Primary Review (Alexander 2009) focusing on the primary years, advocated the division of knowledge into areas or domains of learning. By contrast, the 2014 National Curriculum orders mark a return to the supremacy of 'subjects'. This renewed emphasis on knowledge breaks with the 2007 reforms of the National Curriculum which emphasised the interests and experience of learners (Young 2011, p.266). For Young, the nature of the curriculum links closely with ideas of the purposes of schooling. Referring to a previous study (Young and Muller 2010), Young's argument is that a prescribed body of knowledge which every child should know, and which every teacher must transmit, treats access to knowledge as the core purpose of the curriculum and assumes that the boundaries that delineate that knowledge are largely given (Young 2011, p.266). Knowledge is valued for its own sake, suggesting that schooling is an intellectual challenge for both teachers and pupils. The inference is that teachers are technicians, as in Gove's understanding of pedagogy as craft. They are not expected to engage critically with the material or educational ideas they are to implement (Alexander 2004, p.12). This is in contrast to Oakeshott's view of the curriculum as an orderly programme of studies based on the languages of human understanding and of art (Williams 2007, p.65).

For Oakeshott then the purpose of the curriculum is to initiate young people into these languages for the ultimate purpose of assimilating them into the

conversation of mankind. This is in sharp contrast to socialisation to which schooling has been reduced by state control. Education, rather than socialisation demands a particular form of curriculum. This would be a curriculum that offers the pupil substantive, identifiable bodies of knowledge and skill that can be taught and learned. These must emerge from the languages of human understanding in a way that reflects the genuine nature of those languages (Williams 2007, p.67). Here Oakeshott sets up the distinction between two modes of thought - 'language' and 'literature' or 'text', in other words a distinction between a manner of thinking and what has been said before - facts, information, discoveries- in the context of a specific language (*ibid*). Such an understanding leads Oakeshott to promote a linear curriculum from early education to university. It is a curriculum that is not intended to serve the wants of pupils but that initiates them into the languages of mankind. He concedes however, that a curriculum based on subjects is probably best for this purpose (*ibid*, p.69).

What constitutes knowledge in the new national curriculum?

The aims for the new, scaled-back national curriculum outlined by Gove (2010b) are to make opportunity more equal and to give teachers more professional freedom. This is based on a belief that 'knowledge is a basic building block for a successful life' (Gibb 2010). Learning is essentially a knowledge producing activity and, indeed for Gibb, education is about the transfer of knowledge from generation to generation (*ibid*). But what constitutes knowledge? Knowledge can be said to take three fundamental forms: cognitive, skill -based or dispositional (Scott 2014, p.1), where dispositional means the propensity to behave in certain ways in certain conditions. All three forms of knowledge are different and require different forms of assessing and evaluating. Given then, that knowledge is contested, the decisions about what should be included or excluded in terms of curriculum content will, also be different and contested.

Nick Gibb, as Schools Secretary, offers an insight into what government values as knowledge. Formulated around subjects, knowledge in science is about 'getting to grips with the basics - of elements, of metals, of halogens and of

acids' with the purpose of understanding some of the great advances that have revolutionised our lives (Gibb 2010). Tellingly:

The facts, dates and narrative of our history in fact join us all together. The rich language of Shakespeare should be the common property of us all. The great figures of literature that still populate the conversations of all those who regard themselves as well-educated should be known to all (*ibid*).

The reforms to the National Curriculum, therefore appear to preference knowledge above skills. However, the key issue concerns what particular understanding of knowledge underpins the national curriculum; a question which is almost systematically avoided by educationalists and was absent in the debates leading to the 2014 curriculum reforms led by politicians (Young 2013.) Oakeshott's typology of knowledge distinguishes between articulated knowledge; the knowledge of an activity that can be put into words, and 'complete' or concrete knowledge that is made evident through the practice of the activity itself (Williams 2007, p.152). This relates to Oakeshott's language/literature divide. Every human skill from mowing the lawn to the activities of the scientist or historian can be understood as a metaphorical language of human achievement (*ibid*). In the same way, every skill also offers a literature - the propositional element of knowledge or 'information' (*ibid*). Every skill therefore is capable of generating technical literature or technical knowledge understood as the rules that govern the skill (*ibid*, p.153). It is 'disjunctive' in so far as it is disjoined from the knowledge in use. It is distinct from theoretical or propositional knowledge in that the latter is derived from enquiry. Disjunctive knowledge does not allow an individual to practice a skill given that rules do not tell an individual what to do in a particular situation. Thus knowing that Wellington rather than Nelson fought at the battle of Waterloo may be important cultural knowledge for Nick Gibb (2010), but it does not make an historian. Disjunctive knowledge therefore alone does not constitute 'complete' knowledge. To acquire this form of knowledge - the exercise of a skill through the mastery of its language, the learner must acquire 'practical' or 'technical knowledge' - 'know-how', 'connoisseurship' or judgement' (Williams 2007, p.154) referred to earlier.

But for what purpose? Oakeshott's philosophy argues the purpose of learning is to be initiated into the conversation of mankind. The curriculum, therefore, is constructed of those modes through which the conversation is conducted, particularly natural science and history. For Gove and Gibb, however, the purpose of the curriculum is at once far ranging - to reduce inequality and the bureaucratic burden on teachers, and prescriptive setting out specific content relevant to each year. The purpose is to

ensure that pupils have the knowledge they need at each stage of their education, and restore parity between our curriculum and qualifications, and the best the world has to offer: whether that is Massachusetts, Singapore, Finland, Hong Kong, or Alberta (Gibb 2010).

Summary

Coalition education policy and the Big Society

Like everything in the agreement that unites this coalition government, our education policies are guided by the three principles of freedom, responsibility and fairness. We're going to give schools greater freedom and parents more opportunity to choose good schools (Gibb 2010).

Freedom from or freedom to?

The central tenet of the Big Society is the production of small government, the reduction of state intervention in lives of individuals, communities and institutions such as schools and hospitals. Freedom from state control is promoted through the Conservative Coalition education reforms as autonomy; professional autonomy for teachers and school leaders, civic autonomy for communities to decide on the type of schools they require and moral autonomy to do 'what is best'. To some extent this can be evidenced through the promotion of Academies and Free Schools - freed from local authority control and created in response to local choice in the instance of Free Schools. Such schools are also freed from the restrictions of the national curriculum, creating a puzzling division between

those who have access to this body of knowledge, the concepts of which 'must be taught. And they must be taught to everyone' (*ibid*) and those who do not. But freedom *from* is not the same as freedom *to*. Limits and boundaries are set to maintain centralised control over the school system and education reform as a whole.

Responsibility and fairness

Inevitably then, alongside state constructed freedom comes state imposed responsibility, particularly in the realms of welfare, work and training together with social responsibility, volunteering and philanthropy. Fairness is sought in narrowing the attainment gap between the best and poorest performing pupils and schools with the ultimate aim of narrowing the gap between the performance of England's school system and those nations at the top of international league tables.

What emerges from this brief analysis is what Brian Simon referred to as 'the dominance of ideology over principle' (Alexander 2004, p.8) where theoretical understandings of pedagogy are subjugated to political ends. This may be one way of containing the natural fault lines between the Conservatism of Cameron and Gove, and the Liberalism of Clegg and Gibb. Certainly, in their outline for government the two political leaders were positive about the strengths of the arrangement:

when you take Conservative plans to strengthen families and encourage social responsibility, and add to them the Liberal Democrat passion for protecting our civil liberties and stopping the relentless incursion of the state into the lives of individuals, you create a Big Society matched by big citizens. This offers the potential to completely recast the relationship between people and the state: citizens empowered; individual opportunity extended; communities coming together to make lives better (Cabinet Office 2010a, p.8).

However, how far this agreement is evident in education policy and sustained through the Big Society ideal will be explored in the final chapter.

Chapter 4: Reflections on Policy in Relation to the Big Society

Introduction

So far, this thesis has explored the concept of the Big Society, its central tenets, intellectual antecedents and instantiation in the Conservative Coalition education policy enacted by Michael Gove as Secretary of State (2010-2014). Arguably, the Big Society is perhaps the most significant ideological theme to have emerged from the UK Conservative Party in recent years. Ideology of this nature serves two political purposes: first to provide a framework within which politicians and others can operate, and second as a 'marketing device' or electoral tool (Heywood n.d.) to secure potential voters. These two purposes are, of necessity, interrelated and require traceable roots within party thinking and a vision which resonates with the public at large. Yet, the notion of the Big Society has found difficulties on both counts, acknowledged early on by the House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee (PASC 2011). In their analysis, the want of a coherent policy agenda across all government departments explains the lack of transparency and public understanding. Thus, in a departure from the original intention of the role of the state in realising the Big Society, they claim Whitehall is now referring to the Big Society merely as 'a set of principles underpinning the Government's policy agenda rather than a self-contained project' (PASC 2012, p.4). These principles, however, remain unchanged: empowering people, encouraging social action and opening up social services to private enterprise.

This shift in thinking, from agenda to underlying principles, is significant, particularly as it raises questions about the limits and possibilities of the notion of a Big Society and how such limits and possibilities might be evidenced in English education policy. These limits and possibilities are framed both by the internal coherence of the policy concept of a Big Society and the external pressures exerted upon its interpretation and implementation. In order to explore this further, two contrasting frameworks are employed here. The first draws on French anthropologist Lévi-Strauss's notion of *bricolage* whilst the second considers the agency of political ideas in policy-making. Vidovich's (2007) hybridised model approach is also explored, one 'which can simultaneously draw

on the strengths of different approaches' (*ibid*, p.285) in an attempt to make sense of the wider contexts in which policy is formulated and enacted.

Policy as Bricolage

Bricolage, as defined by Lévi-Strauss (1962), is, at its simplest, a technical metaphor for both a cognitive and creative process. In other words, it is about the use and deployment of tools and materials. These might be physical instruments or, in the case of policy making, intellectual capacities. In the realms of business and industry, the imperative of maintaining sustainable, competitive advantage, requires the continuous generation of innovative and coherent policies. New knowledge is generated in several ways. Cibbora (2004, p.45), for example, alludes to innovation as creating new knowledge about resources, goals, tasks, markets, products and processes. The skills and competencies required here, represent both the resources to hand and the constraints for innovation.

For Lévi-Strauss, the activity of *bricolage* is achieved through the agency of the *bricoleur*, rather than the reverse. In *The Savage Mind* (Lévi-Strauss 1962), the *bricoleur* is distinguished from the engineer in that:

The 'bricoleur' is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but, unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project. His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game is always to make do with whatever 'is at hand', that is to say, with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous... (*ibid*, p.17).

There is no direct parallel for *bricoleur* in the English context, but it is closest to the notion of a Jack-of-all-trades or professional odd-job man. *Bricolage*, therefore, is essentially about the process of selection and combination of resources. Resources are heterogeneous in that they have no relation to any particular project.

Weick (2001, p.63) sets out the processes engaged in by the *bricoleur*: retrospection, reflection, projection and generalisation. Applying this optic to the conceptualisation of the Big Society and 'compassionate conservatism', demonstrates how conservative thought over time has been drawn together to articulate and justify Big Society ideals.

A retrospective: the miscellany of conservative thought

The first step in Weick's process is retrospective in that it involves interrogating the existing set of resources. At first sight, the Big Society argues for 'citizens empowered'; individual opportunity extended; communities coming together to make lives better (Cabinet Office 2010a), but deeper analysis has so far in this thesis, indicated a miscellany of intellectual and political ideals, brought together pick'n'mix style, in order to articulate Cameron's social and political agendas. This resonates with Jesse Norman's conclusions about what may be termed 'intellectual conservatism': conservatism as a cluster of ideas competing with each other for the market share. It differs from its political rivals in that 'it is instinctive, not theoretical, a disposition not a doctrine, realistic and sceptical not grandiose or utopian, accepting of the imperfectability of man, not restless to overcome it' (Norman and Ganesh 2006, p.32). Interrogation of this intellectual legacy suggests to Norman, a *mélange* of ideas organised around two traditional camps; the liberal/libertarian and the paternalistic conservative (*ibid*, p.29). Liberal or libertarian conservatives hold to free market economics, localism and private property, whereas paternalistic conservatives prioritise community and social stability. Both intellectual positions appear in Conservative Party thinking and serve to illustrate the complexity and heterogeneity of conservative thought. Kelly (2012, p.23) further highlights the complicated history of liberal ideas within the Conservative Party. He demonstrates that the ideas of both Hayek and Oakeshott have framed conservative thinking in the latter half of the twentieth century and are, in essence, concerned with the intricate relationship between conservative politics and policy and liberal ideas and practice.

Reflection: historical experience

The second step in the process of the *bricoleur* is to reflect upon the prior uses of resources in order to identify what the object signifies- what do we know about certain resources from historical experience? Kelly's reference to "Orange Book" conservatism, for example, capitalises on the Liberal Party's publication The Orange Book (Marshall and Laws 2004) where four phases of liberalism: the personal, political, economic and social were identified. Based on this historical retrospective, Kelly concludes that the aim of the liberal politician is to strike a balance between all four phases of liberalism so described. Other key influences identified in the early chapters of this thesis sought to demonstrate how interpretations of the role of the state and society, from Hobbes and Locke, Burke and Disraeli, to Saul Alinsky and Amitai Etzioni have been used to define the Big Society. From the perspective of the *bricoleur*, it is the prior uses and understandings of these espoused concepts that are then manipulated and recombined in order to advance the new project.

Projection: possibilities and potential

The third step in Weick's analysis of the work of the *bricoleur* involves projection - what possibilities do these resources hold in addressing the current problems and issues at hand? The construct of new forms of conservatism and how they might be defined by Big Society ideals looks to a political philosophy that stresses the use of conservative approaches and concepts, such as a belief in traditional institutions and property ownership, to improve the general welfare of society. Hence, in moving away from the Thatcher legacy, David Cameron, in his acceptance speech as leader of the Conservative Party in 2005, called for "a modern and compassionate conservatism which is right for our times and our country" (Norman and Ganesh 2006, p.1). However, the fact that this is not achieved suggests capitalism wins.

This new model of conservatism, for Norman, addresses what he considers to be the twin threats to society of a lack of trust emerging from the breakdown of social ties, and a lack of security derived from perceived external threats such as

terrorism, diminishing energy supplies and irreversible environmental damage. These threats are inextricably linked and so far, according to Norman, have been tackled through a single and inflexible model of state provision of public services which has failed. In his view, compassionate conservatism offers an alternative to this post war, persistent, statist consensus and 'a humane principled, long-term intellectual basis for social renewal' (ibid, p.3). This is to be achieved through the building of a greater sense of cultural identity based on British society, its institutions and values and its contribution to the world. As a social agenda, it requires the devolution of power from Whitehall to independent institutions, the private and voluntary sectors and to local government. It demands a new understanding of the relationship between the state and the individual, thus stressing the horizontal bonds of civil association found in the philosophy of Oakeshott, as opposed to the vertical, top down social contract model of Hobbes. Yet, what is missing from both these philosophical understandings is any notion of the connectedness of the individuals that make up society. Compassionate conservatism, for Norman, therefore, embodies three principal insights: that persons are social animals, that they create institutions of extraordinary range and diversity which, of themselves, help shape those who belong to them and society more widely, and finally, that some of these institutions stand between the people and the state, acting as buffers, conduits, outlets and guarantors of stability. Here one might allude, (although Norman does not) to the central role of education as a mediating institution. Education stands between the political aims of government and civil society and should serve both the general and personal good.

Generalisation: creating the new

Finally, through the use of generalisation, analogies and comparisons, the *bricoleur* assembles resources into new arrangements. Norman, as one of the key exponents of the Big Society, draws on strands of liberal and conservative thought to construct, in the manner of the *bricoleur*, a new iteration of conservatism that is more relevant to the current social and political context. Calling on the work of Michael Oakeshott, Norman (Norman and Ganesh 2006) argues for a compassionate conservatism that takes further Oakeshott's dual

concepts of an 'enterprise' and 'civil' or associative society. Both operate according to different rules. In an enterprise society the role of government is to achieve certain social objectives. It is not content merely to govern but directs its activities, such as the creation of laws, to serve its goals. In a civil society, rules are more procedural, setting frameworks within which people can live, rather than goals to achieve. But Oakeshott's categories of procedure and purpose do not describe in sufficient detail the institutions that emerge from both civil and enterprise society. For Norman, the crucial feature which helps explain the centrality of institutions such as family, supporters' clubs or a company, is that they are 'in very different ways [...] based in and constituted by human affection' (*ibid*, p.42). This missing category is defined as *philic* association after the Greek *philia* (friendship, tie, affection). This points to a society constructed on horizontal lines which produces connection and identity for its citizens.

The challenge for all of us is to develop public policies that recognise, protect and enhance our connected society, and that enrich the cultural conversation within it (*ibid*, p.55).

Norman's contention, therefore, is that the whole nature and character of individuals is determined by their existence in society. Markets are not an end in themselves, but the 'greatest' means of generating wealth and have an inherent capacity for promoting freedom and, therefore, for challenging bureaucratic authority. Thus, in order to achieve its goal, compassionate conservatism is built on the three principles of freedom, decentralisation and accountability. Freedom *from* excessive state intervention in the lives of individuals, and freedom to take personal responsibility; the decentralisation of power and responsibility from the state to the individual, and accountability where political power is made accountable to the citizenry. This, for Norman, represents limiting state power and preserving and extending democracy.

Blond, on the other hand, puts together a different set of ideas in his construction of Red Toryism referred to in Section 2 of this thesis. In his view, social conservatism is the means of countering the effects of neoliberal economics. Here, any traditional links that position concern for the poor in the context of

class struggle are separated; localism and small scale employment initiatives are promoted in order to counter the hierarchies of state and multi-national corporations (along the lines of the German Mittelstand), and elites are given clear roles in social management. Blond's account of a moral and associative civil society pulls together certain views on the family, civil culture and moral values, influenced by his reading of political theology. Hence, as Cibbora (2004, p.49) claims, the resources at hand for the *bricoleur*, in this instance strands of party political intellectual and theological thought, become the tools for change that define, *in situ*, the heuristic to solve the 'problem' of a 'broken Britain'. Practices and situations disclose new uses for and applications of these intellectual ideas. This relates to what Harper (1987: cited in Weick, 2001, p.63) sees as the role of the *bricoleur*; a thinker who makes creative use of whatever builds up during the process of work. There is an obvious connection here with the contributions made by party intellectuals such as Lord Wei, Lord Glassman and Jesse Norman, as well as members of think tanks and 'philosopher kings' such as Phillip Blond.

Limitations

If the concept of *bricolage* helps explain the process of selection of intellectual antecedents in the construct of the Big Society and Big Society discourse, then it may also highlight its own inherent limitations as a tool for both assembling and interpreting policy. Principal amongst these limitations is the recognition that there is a degree of dependence upon the past in terms of the elements selected and used for policy formation. Resources, as stated earlier, are affected more by the ways in which people have codified them in the past, than how they might envision the future (Weick 2001, p.64). Accordingly, failure, from the perspective of the *bricoleur*, may occur because:

- people are too detached and do not see the present situation in enough detail
- past experience is limited or unsystematised
- people are unwilling or unable to work with the resources they have at hand

- a preoccupation with decision rationality makes it impossible for people to accept the rationality of making do (*ibid*)

Certainly, the notion of the Big Society has failed to gain purchase in some quarters. The House of Commons Select Committee (PASC, 2012) construes this as a failure of policy implementation: a lack of a coherent cross-department implementation plan and cross-Government coherence. Citing the experience of charities, whose work straddles a number of government departments, the Select Committee raise concerns about accessing government funding for cross-department projects. For example, the charity Emmaus, who serve the homeless, address:

issues such as mental health, alcoholism and addiction, and education and skills, as well as homelessness. These issues are covered separately by the Department of Health, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Cabinet Office as well as local authorities, who have statutory responsibility for homelessness. Existing Government programmes, such as the Work Programme, work in only single departments, and are not suitable for people with multiple and complex needs (*ibid*, p.4).

The Committee also highlight the difficulty Government has had in communicating the notion of the Big Society in 'simple language' (*ibid*, p.3). Amongst those in the third sector and faith based groups, there was a belief that they were already 'doing' the Big Society. For example, in their report on the Big Society, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (2011) state that 'it's clear that the sector wants to be part of the debate around the Big Society. Many feel they are delivering the Big Society already – and have been doing so for many years – and they are keen to have their voices heard'. The Church of England (Brown 2010) have equally commented on the similarities between the life and work of the church and the out working of Big Society ideals. Applying the optic of *bricolage* may, therefore, explain the puzzlement of the Select Committee and others, highlighting their misunderstanding of the nature and complexity of both policy construction and its subsequent implementation.

Application of *bricolage* as a theoretical framework also shows up the inherent inconsistencies and lack of internal coherence contained within the Big Society narrative itself. Norman and Blond, for example, each have contrasting views on the aims and means of a Big Society. Whereas Norman is looking to extending the power of citizens whilst limiting that of state generated bureaucracies in order that citizens might flourish in a market driven society, Blond points to moral values as a means of militating against the harsh realities of neoliberal economics for both individuals and communities. On the one hand the market is to be welcomed, on the other it is to be treated with caution. What is provided as evidence of a 'broken Britain', and the negative effects of free market liberalism, are blurred in the construct of an ostensibly neoliberal ideology that favours a small state and a proactive role for entrepreneurship. An alternative approach to addressing the questions of policy formation and enactment is to consider work done by Hall, Gourevitch and Hirschman amongst others (Hall 1988) on the diffusion and uptake of ideas across nations.

Policy and the Power of Ideas

If applying the theoretical lens of *bricolage* to the notion of a Big Society has highlighted its intrinsic contradictions and limitations, then exploring the political power or agency of ideas uncovers certain extrinsic pressures and limitations at work in its construction and implementation. Indeed, Hall (1988, p.4) argues that ideas have a significant influence over policy-making, and play an important role in the affairs of state. In exploring the adoption of Keynesianism across nations, Hall (*ibid*) identified three theoretical models that go some way to explaining this influence: the economist-centred; the state-centred and the coalition-centred approaches.

The 'economist-centred' model

In analysis of the Big Society this may be considered a 'specialist -' or 'expert -centred' approach that represents a *trickle-up* model for the diffusion of ideas. Over time, one theory supersedes another because it proves better at explaining empirical observations that remain atypical in terms of earlier theory. The

persuasiveness of new ideas depends on the way they fit with other existing ideas and relevant theories. It also depends upon the institutional parameters that structure communication with policy makers. Hall points to the institutional parameters that structure the nature and means of communication, with policy makers at the top. He cites the degree to which there exists a large and sophisticated body of academic thinkers and practitioners, the influence given to younger exponents of the ideas, the openness of public authorities to advice and personnel and the relative influence of professionals inside the policy-making arm of government. The ability to lobby parliament is perhaps also crucial. The role of think tanks and their access to persons of influence in the corridors of power at Whitehall is pertinent here, such as the close associations of Phillip Blond and his think-tank ResPublica, or the Lords Wei and Glassman or Jesse Norman and their access to Cameron and the Conservatives in the early days of the 2010 Coalition Government. Specialists and key thinkers, particularly in the fields of social policy, community, faith and third sector organisations, have all contributed to the construct of the Big Society agenda, building on prior understandings and analysis of the socio-political context in which they operate. The interest of businesses such as the Reg Vardy motor company or the Harris Federation with its roots in carpet manufacture in developing academy chains or creating Free Schools, serve as examples. This 'specialist-centred' model then, is a bottom-up approach to policy making, dependent upon the credibility of ideas, the empirical evidence which supports them and a wide acceptance of them amongst practitioners and experts on the ground.

The 'state-centred' approach

Second in Hall's typology, is the state-centred approach (*ibid*, p.11). In this instance, the reception accorded new ideas is influenced by the institutional configuration of the state and its experience with related policy. This represents a more *trickle-down* approach to policy construction. The relative openness of policy-making institutions to advice from outside experts is said to affect the speed with which new ideas are incorporated into policy. The administrative biases implicit in the institutional division of responsibility within the state will also condition the receptiveness of key agencies to new ideas. A state may have the

bureaucratic structures already in place to implement a new policy relatively swiftly, otherwise it may not. Equally, some states may be predisposed toward certain policies, making their adoption fairly straightforward. In England, the political inclination towards new public management on both sides of the House since the 1990s has already predisposed the administrative arm of government towards 'rolling back the state' and for actively promoting a localism agenda, albeit for a number of different reasons. Although this model has some merit in drawing attention to the role administrative problems play in the process of policy-making, in Hall's view, it also has limitations in that it presents a dominant role for the apparatus of the state and diminishes the role of the political world (*ibid*, p.12). In other words it appears to privilege the role of officials, including civil servants, over that of politicians.

The 'coalition-centred' approach

Finally, is the coalition-centred approach advocated by authors such as Peter Gourevitch (*ibid*, p.12). Here, policies are seen to require support from a broad coalition of groups on whose votes and good will politicians ultimately depend. The argument is that a nation's readiness to implement new policies depends on the ability of its politicians to forge a coalition or partnership with a broad base of social groups, large enough to sustain them in office and who will regard the new policy as something that is in their interests. This suggests a more pragmatic approach to policy making and one perhaps more suited to fixed term administrations such as those in England. The advantage of this approach is that it acknowledges the broader political context in which ideas are forged and throws into relief the competition between interest groups for scarce resources (*ibid*, p.13). The interdependence of politicians and social groups in the co-construction of policy is therefore highlighted. But for Hall, the model also leaves open the question of how these groups come to define their interests in a particular way, in other words their ability to reframe their own thinking to fit the emergent conceptualisation of a policy and facilitate its uptake by government. This is indicated by the orientation of many organisations towards Big Society aims in the early days of the coalition government such as those claims made by Wycombe District Council (n.d.) who identify existing partnership activities as

relating to the Big Society. These include an Arts Centre, a community bus service, advice and support for the homeless and even the existence of the Council's web page on Facebook.

Three factors then, are at work in policy construction: the availability of relevant ideas, their advocates and the role of national leaders in their uptake; the role of relevant social groups or coalitions in supporting or opposing policy innovation and the institutional arrangements that facilitate or impede the entry of innovative ideas into policy (Weir 1998). Hall's analysis is that ideas are central to politics in two ways: a sense of collective purpose is forged from the many competing moral visions put forward by contenders for political power and solutions to common problems are devised out of the policy proposals generated by intellectuals and officials alike. These processes are complementary. They hint at the power relationships between the state and the institutions of government and civil society. Furthermore they indicate that the interplay between ideas, state power, administrative structures and interest groups is highly complex.

Vidovich's 'hybridised model'

A third way of understanding the construction and implementation of the Big Society agenda is to take Vidovich's (2007) hybridised model approach: a model which highlights the importance of context in relation to policy formation. It aims to dislodge policy from the exclusive domain of policy elites at the macro level and give focus to those operating at all levels of the process. To some extent the potential for this is indicated in Hall (1998) in that the currency of particular ideas and the agency of their proponents is noted across all strata from practitioner and expert, to government ministers. Vidovich's contribution of a hybridised model moves away from presenting policy research in terms of mere dualisms (such as post-modernist *versus* post structuralist perspectives) and brings together both macro and micro perspectives on the policy process, acknowledging both agency and constraint for all policy actors concerned (Vidovich 2007).

The balance between constraint and agency for policy participants will vary depending on the specific policy and the particular time and place, because the dynamics of policy processes are context specific (*ibid*, p.295).

Central to understanding this balance between constraint and agency and the outworking of power relations between policy actors is the socio-political and economic context in which policy is constructed. The twin ideologies of capitalism and neoliberalism define the context in which Western and, therefore, English policy making takes place and these same ideologies, simultaneously frame and militate against the policy changes encapsulated in the Big Society.

We are all neoliberals now

Crouch (2013, p.23) distinguishes three different meanings of the idea of neoliberal. Pure neoliberals, claim that society will be at its best when the conditions of the perfect market can be achieved in all areas of life. This requires extensive competition among multiple producers and a strong state that restricts itself to maintaining the conditions in which such markets may operate. The role of the state is to protect property rights, to extend the role of markets into further areas and to guarantee competition. This 'neoliberalism of the first kind' restricts itself to these tasks only. 'Neoliberalism of the second kind', however, accepts the value and priority of markets in the economy but is aware of their limitations and deficiencies, in particular their inability to deal with externalities (those by-products of market activity) and public goods. There are some areas where the market is not appropriate and neoliberals holding to this view will act to protect these. Unlike socialists, they accept the superiority of the capitalist economy over state ownership, but seek to use the state and other non-market institutions to militate against its defects (*ibid*, p.24). Finally 'neoliberalism of the third kind', or 'actually existing neoliberalism' stands diametrically opposed to its originating ideas and refers to the amalgam of the corporate lobbying of government and the development of corporate and other private wealth in politics that usually accompanies the introduction of the neoliberal agenda. It is this kind of

neoliberalism, neoliberalism as a political movement, that, in Crouch's analysis, is both pervasive and the more sinister aspect of reality.

Markets

Markets offer certain advantages (*ibid*, p.25). They can operate as efficient allocators of resources, enabling citizens to engage in transactions and choices without needing to refer to a central body. Furthermore, a market economy provides for choice in a context of alternatives, change and adaptation. It actively encourages innovation. Choice works on both consumer and producer so that in a free market certain goods will still be chosen. But markets also create problems. Often termed market 'failures' (*ibid*, p.26) Crouch identifies these 'inadequacies' as imperfect competition, inadequate information, the existence of public goods and the existence of negative externalities. In reality, market competition is often imperfect, there may be, by necessity, only a few producers serving particular customers, as in the case of public utilities. Or it may be difficult for new producers to enter a particular market because of the start-up costs. Access to the necessary information in order to make 'right' choices, similarly can be problematic, particularly for ordinary citizens. How, asks Crouch (*ibid*, p.29), are parents and children to know the value of education to them in twenty or thirty years' time?

Education is a public good and the existence of public goods in a market economy is, for Crouch, also considered troublesome. The question of public goods hinges on the generally accepted rule that they are non-rival and non-excludable. Non-rival refers to those goods that may be consumed by one person whilst not preventing another from doing so (for example access to radio waves or the internet) whereas non-excludable means it should be impossible to exclude people from the enjoyment of a non-rival good (for example the environment). If it is not possible, then such goods cannot be provided in the market. State education, according to this rule, is (and should) operate as a public good. In a pure market economy, goods that cannot be provided by the market will not be provided at all (*ibid*, p.30) and they will be subject to neglect. This logic means that many public goods will not exist. The apparent alternative

in a market society is either to turn them into marketable commodities (the opening of state education to private enterprise) or for government to create a public agency with responsibility for caring for the public good (The Environment Agency). Finally, the issue of negative externalities, those unintended consequences or by-products of market activity, also require one of three responses; to consider the externality insufficiently important to warrant public attention, to levy a tax or other charges to make producers limit or remove the undesirable outcome of production (pollution) or to subject producers to legal regulation.

In each of these instances, a tension exists between 'the market wherever possible' and 'the state where necessary' (*ibid*, p.26). Thus, although in England state education has long been considered a public good, its existence within the market economy means that more and more it is regarded as a marketable commodity where policy-makers must grapple with the market/state tension. The same is true for the National Health Service and welfare provision more generally. What emerges is political neoliberalism that threatens social democracy in that the general and widespread interests of the many come a poor second to those of a privileged few (*ibid*, p.47). To demonstrate this, Crouch moves beyond the language of 'producer' and 'consumer,' common to neoliberal discourse, to highlight a key separation in the role of 'consumer' between 'customer' and 'user'. The division serves to indicate the extensive nature of the power of corporations and the passivity of individual citizens (teachers and parents) in the neoliberal economy. Customers are not necessarily users. Crouch (*ibid*, p.46) takes an example from the sale of monopoly rights to televise sporting events. The market relationship is between the owner of the event and the corporation buying the monopoly. Those who watch the sporting fixture are not customers but mere users. Translated into the field of state education the 'corporation' is the business interest sponsoring academy chains such as Ormiston Education, E-Act (formerly EduTrust Academies Charitable Trust) or CfBT (Centre for British Teachers) for example; the passive users are parents and children. This political neoliberalism is far removed from the liberal ideals of Edmund Burke or Michael Oakeshott, whose philosophies look to the betterment of all persons in society rather than a privileged elite who are able to win

advantage on the basis of knowledge and wealth. This explanation offers a strong indication why a social institution such as education has proved incapable of addressing the widening achievement gap between the socially and educational elite able to pay for, or obtain access through house purchase, to the best state and private schools, and the majority who appear left behind. Education becomes a positional good rather than for the good of all. The question remains, when and how does the state become necessary?

Before such a question can be answered, Crouch draws on the writings of Polanyi to demonstrate that the introduction of markets during the spread of capitalism destroyed the fabric of social relationships in traditional society (*ibid*, p.49) such as that of landowner and peasant. A similar claim is made by Hirschman in his *Rival Views of Market Society* (1992). Where destruction occurs, Crouch argues that the significant issue is what the market puts in its place and how that alternative might be evaluated. To this end, he points to some of the key confrontations between markets and institutions so as to illustrate the complexities of both markets and the attempts to address the problems they cause. These he explores in terms of markets and trust, markets and morality, markets and externalities.

Markets and Trust

The argument here is that in traditional societies, where markets have not penetrated, trading agreements depended on trust. Indeed Hirschman goes so far as to argue that in the early days of capitalism one of the positive by-products of markets was a:

more polished human type - the more honest, reliable, orderly and disciplined as well as more friendly and helpful ever ready to find solutions to conflicts and a middle ground for opposed opinions (Hirschman 1992, p.109).

Modern markets have changed this through the effective law of contract intended to drive out the unreliable, incompetent or dishonest, if the market mechanisms,

themselves, fail to do so (Crouch 2013, p.50). In this way, the growth of the market displaces trust between individuals with a sophisticated law of contract. Furthermore, as Polyani pointed out, the replacement of trust by contract can undermine those very institutions that had supported trust (*ibid*, p.51): institutions such as schools, Christian marriage or the National Health Service. The logic of this argument progresses as follows. The law of contract displaces the need for trust. Trust is no longer cultivated nor valued and the mechanisms that supported it are neglected. People, therefore, find they can no longer trust each other and find themselves relying on contract. As a consequence, trust becomes eroded outside the normal reach of the market. Hence the introduction of Home School Agreements in 1999 and upheld by the coalition (DfE 2013b) which operate as quasi-contractual agreements between parents, pupils and the school, or the move towards legalising the status of prenuptial agreements (Bowcott 2014) and the tendency towards litigation in cases where medical treatments go wrong (Crouch 2013, p.51). The process is further illustrated in the financial banking scandal of 2007-8. Fuelled by a breakdown in trust between trading banks the 'problem' was viewed simply as inadequate regulation. Yet:

despite all the prominent teachings of neoliberalism that the market alone could manage economic relationships, trust still plays an irreducible role in human interactions, even in this field of purest financial calculation (*ibid*, p.52).

Crouch (*ibid*, p.53) uses this example to highlight the tension between three sources of order, each of which failed: the conservative institution of trust, the neoliberal institution of the market and the social democratic preference for legal regulation, his conclusion being that the participants in the process failed to recognise how far trust and regulation had been eroded by the market until significant damage had been done.

Markets and morality

The market also proves itself amoral, putting a price on human beings, their security, their organs and even their death (Sandel 2012). This, Crouch argues,

is the natural logic of neoclassical economics (Crouch 2013, p.55) and this logic removes the need for a morality or ethics in behaviour. The moral issue of trust between patient and doctor on the basis that the doctor is a good and honest person is now replaced by a trust in the governing institution of the medical profession in order to guarantee high standards of behaviour. Moral trust then becomes institutional trust. This presents tensions for conservatives who favour the 'small state' against a social, democratic welfare state and redistributive taxation (*ibid*, p.57), and yet are uncomfortable with the amorality and civil injustice that arise from a rigorous market approach. In Crouch's analysis this leads conservatives to invent elaborate reasons to explain why it is the welfare state, rather than neoliberalism, that is to blame for the unpalatable aspects of contemporary society. Choice solutions to improving services are offered as counters to state monopoly based on the assumption that competition will improve quality and responsiveness to customer demand. This assumes of course that both customers and users are aiming for the same objectives.

Sandel's theory of crowding out

However, where there may be limits to the promise of market solutions, there are seemingly no limits to market incursion. Sandel refers to this as 'crowding out' (2012, p.113). Market values crowd out non-market values which are worth caring about. What those values might be are both situational and open to debate. However, if society decides that certain goods may be bought and sold, then these goods become commodities; instruments of profit and use. Government and society would not explicitly allow children to be bought and sold, yet schooling has been turned into a commodity and as such we might argue that the product of schooling, those principles of teaching and learning, pedagogy and knowledge, have been corrupted, even degraded. For Sandel, we have moved from *having* a market economy to *being* a market society, where market values seep into every aspect of human endeavour and where social relations are made over in the image of the market. The monetary motive crowds out other, perhaps higher considerations (*ibid*, p.58) and this raises moral and political questions, rather than purely economic ones. Where the market erodes non-market norms, the moral question is whether the loss is significant. Some

moral assessment is called for, such as whether the loss of non-market norms and expectations would change the character of an activity such as teaching, in ways that we would, or should, regret. Does, for example, the introduction of performance related pay for teachers or the removal of the requirement for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) for teachers in Academies and Free Schools alter the perception of who might be considered a 'good' and dedicated teacher? Market reasoning involves moral reasoning.

Markets and externalities

Perhaps one of the most tenacious by-products of neoliberal societies is widening diversity and growing inequality amongst the populace. Different levels of wealth-holding determine how well individuals can face risk in terms of both prosperity and knowledge (Crouch 2013, p.72). Wealth, and the knowledge upon which it draws, allows its holders to win the best deals. This is a problem, not of ideology, but the power of globalised capital which operates at national and local levels through the funding of political campaigns, ownership of mass media, resources for lobbying and the ability to purchase the best brains (*ibid*, p.190). On this basis, societies in Britain and the USA particularly, have become more and more stratified and this has particular consequences for the state provision of schooling (Ball 1993; Whitty 2001; Riddell 2003). Indeed Ball (1993, p.4) argued that the introduction of markets into education represented a 'class strategy' the consequence of which has been the relative reproduction of class (and ethnic) advantage and disadvantage. This, he relates to 'the interplay of three key elements: the self-interest of some producers, the self-interest of some consumers and the control of the performance criteria of market organisations - which in this case lies with the State'. Indeed, the Big Society Audits (Civil Exchange 2012, 2013) highlight the impact of urban disadvantage on the take up of the Big Society initiatives which depend on the extent to which communities trust and support each other. Those in disadvantaged and urban communities appear less able to take initiatives forward than those in more privileged ones (Civil Exchange 2012, p.7). In other words, 'It is harder for privileged children to fail than it is for disadvantaged children to succeed' (Bottero 2009, p.10). This

clearly has implications for all schools but especially those schools working in challenging circumstances.

So at what point is ‘the state where necessary’?

The Big Society: part of the answer or part of the problem?

Viewed in this light the construct of a Big Society looks like an attempt to minimise the consequences for society of political neoliberalism. This next section explores this claim in relation to Crouch’s ‘market inadequacies’ framework and current education and social policy. Whereas it may appear that issues of imperfect markets and inadequate information can be more easily dealt with by technical solutions, this is less true of public goods and externalities.

Imperfect competition

The debates concerning the introduction of the market into education have long been rehearsed. The market context in which education in England exists is more properly termed the ‘quasi-market’ (Carroll and Walford 2006, p.4). This is different from the open, classical market in a number of fundamental ways: on the supply side, schools will not necessarily be privately owned or have profit maximisation as their main objective. On the demand side, as Crouch has also indicated, the ‘purchaser’ (customer) is not necessarily the consumer (user) of what schools have to offer. More fundamentally, children realistically have only one chance of receiving basic education. If the ‘wrong’ choice is made there is little or no option to buy a different brand. Finally, unlike the classical market, the act of choosing a school transforms the product - some schools become full while others empty and a choice for a small school becomes invalid if demand outstrips the availability of places (*ibid*). The Big Society response is to manipulate this quasi-market so that Academies and Free Schools can be established outside of local authority control and to encourage schools to increase the number of places on offer. This has the potential of increasing competition (and thereby standards) and widening options for parental choice thereby limiting the possibilities of making a ‘wrong’ choice. The strategy also

increases the availability of pupil places. However, where there is already a surplus of places, as in Bath and North East Somerset, for example, such action threatens the viability of all local schools in the area. These actions, based on principles of empowering people, encouraging social action and opening up social services to private enterprise, are in fact, adding to the problem of an imperfect education market rather than addressing this particular 'market inadequacy'. Increasing choice and widening the number of education providers operates to serve the interests of education consumers - those businesses and entrepreneurs servicing the market as owners of academy chains or facilitators in the processes of academy start-up or conversion such as lawyers BrowneJacobsen and the Free Schools Network respectively. This is far removed from localism and tapping into the power of local people in local communities to address their particular education needs.

Inadequate information

Extending choice policies is not of itself an answer to the market inadequacies. The ability to exercise choice successfully, depends on the accessibility of information. Knowledge is power. Burgess and Briggs (2009) for example, compared the chances of poor and non-poor children getting places in 'good' schools. Their conclusion was that the lower chance of poor children attending a good school is essentially unaffected by the degree of choice, but, given that schools matter and that schools differ means that 'education markets have to solve an important assignment problem' (*ibid*, p.639), in other words how pupils are allocated to school places. For Burgess and Briggs, the composition of a school inevitably determines the publicly available measure of school quality. This in turn affects parental choice. Schools with higher proportions of poor children will generally produce below average scores in publicly available league tables. Location and distance were presented as key factors in parental choice, but so too the nature and availability of school data and information. Access to information, and the ability to interpret measures such as 'value added' (the contribution a school makes to the progress of an individual pupil) can be costly for parents. Furthermore, statistical data on schools is not value free but is produced by government. Other publicly available information, such as that on a

school's website or in its brochures, is managed for marketing purposes by the school. Even when controlling completely for location, the Burgess and Briggs study suggested that information and the ability to 'work the system' and pay for additional costs such as travel, accounted for the differential between pupils from poor and non-poor backgrounds in their ability to secure a place at a 'good' school. Not only this, but pupil data was also thought to work against pupils from low socio-economic backgrounds in situations where schools were oversubscribed. In these instances, schools operate 'ways of choosing pupils according to their incentives and this correlates negatively with FSM [free school meal] status' (*ibid*, p.647). Again, we see the Big Society response of encouraging local communities to establish a 'good' school where one may be lacking, or to use mediating institutions such as the NCTL or Ofsted to challenge school quality, operating as a market response to the problems created by markets. Those mediating institutions are part of the [neoliberal] bureaucratic arm of government.

Externalities

It has already been argued in this thesis that one of the most pernicious and persistent 'externalities' of establishing a market in education has been the social and economic stratification of schools and communities and within school populations. This as Ball (1993) has argued, amongst many others (Brown 2013; Strand 2012; Riddell 2003; Whitty 2001) has significant consequences for pupil outcomes. The Big Society response has been to promote initiatives that give greater agency to localities and individuals, in order to tackle these ensuing educational inequalities. One example discussed above is the flagship education policy of establishing Free Schools in localities where a 'good' school is thought to be absent. Others include the changes to teacher training along school-based apprenticeship lines such as Schools Direct, or the promotion of 'Teach First' as a strategy for attracting high quality graduates into schools facing challenging circumstances. But again, these are government-promoted initiatives favouring market solutions which, of themselves, are undermined by 'market inadequacies'. This is exemplified in the government's relationship with voluntary and charitable organisations, 'the ostensible cornerstone for the delivery of the

Big Society agenda' (Williams 2012, p.126). Charities and voluntary organisations are called upon to support schools in a number of ways: providing breakfast or after-school clubs, offering supplementary schools for particular minority groups, or funding for school research projects. At a time of austerity and economic downfall in 2011, the voluntary sector faced deep cuts in government funding and subsidies and there were concerns that charities were being exploited and expected to provide their services for free as a means of reducing the costs of private, work programme, providers (*ibid*). The language of neoliberalism pervades the ensuing Government and voluntary sector discussions. 'Building a Stronger Civil Society' (HMG 2010b) and 'Supporting a Stronger Civil Society' (Cabinet Office 2010b), for example, speak of the importance of national infrastructure, mobilising people, partnerships and the independence of the sector, yet at the same time welcome links with multi-nationals such as KPMG and Microsoft and the use of an auditing tool, The Volunteer Investment and Value Audit (VIVA) to assess the value of volunteer's time in relation to the resources used to support them. This tool is a means of capturing the number of volunteers, the nature of their roles and the number of hours 'gifted' over a period of time for any one voluntary organisation. Even volunteering has to be cost effective to those investing their capital.

Thus, as Crouch argues, the use of technical solutions to address issues created by externalities, such as those outlined above, is far from straightforward. This is also true for the existence of public goods in market economies.

Public Goods. State monopoly vs quasi-markets

Arguments for the inadequacies of state monopolies serve to give purchase to market solutions. Ball (1993, p.4) outlined a number of these: for example the fact that the financial support via taxation for state schools is not linked directly to the satisfaction of its clients or the lack of profit and loss motives for school managers leads to conservative, self-interested strategies. State monopolies offer systems of democratic control where parents' and students' interests are outweighed by teachers' unions, professional organisations and other entrenched interests. An example of this would be the allocation of pupils to state

schools via designated 'catchment areas' where allocation within that area depends on certain rules such as a family's proximity to the school. Schools do not compete with each other for pupils or resources but are allocated a budget (historically in England this was via the Local Education Authority). This allocation would in turn be subject to rules such as the staffing level of the school or the facilities it has on offer. Monopoly systems of public service delivery have also been criticised for their inefficiency and lack of incentive to improve performance. As Le Grand (2011, p.:83) argues, if dissatisfied users know they have nowhere else to go they will continue to provide the same level of service. Incentives to improve are generally driven by a higher authority. Furthermore, Le Grand argues that monopolies tend to favour the better off in terms of the distribution of utility or well-being. Middle class parents are more able to move into the catchment area of a preferred school.

However, the final point of Le Grand's argument is to consider the motivation of providers of public services which, he argues, depends on three dimensions: those who work for public services may be driven by the public service 'ethos'; altruism and a deep concern for the welfare of those they serve. In the case of teachers this would be concern for the holistic rather than purely educational well-being of their pupils. Secondly is the consideration that altruism is superior to competitive self-advantage. 'Any replacement of public by private providers involve[s] diminishing the pool of altruistic behaviour - and perhaps altruism itself - in society' (*ibid*, p.86). Finally, is a utilitarian argument that altruistic providers offer better consequences for the well-being of their users: 'public services that are supplied by providers that are motivated by altruism (or the public service ethos) will provide services of better quality and higher quantity than those that are supplied by those fuelled only by financial self-interest' (*ibid*, p.89).

Education, however, exists not within a pure market but within a quasi-market where the state owns the institutions of public service such as schools and hospitals but the provision of services is undertaken by competitive providers. The public service is still offered free, or largely free, at the point of delivery and service users are not allocated to providers, but can make a choice. The state pays the provider for the item of service provided. These providers may be either

for-profit or not-for-profit organisations or, indeed, other public service providers (Le Grand, 2011, p.81).

For Crouch (2013, p.40) it is a neoliberal response to tackle the problems of public goods by making as many as possible private. There is a reluctance, however, to turn education over completely to the private market. Despite an initial hesitation on the part of the state to become directly responsible for the provision of elementary education prior to 1870 (Ball 2012, p.90) there is now a movement, post 2010, to return to the situation of a 'patchwork of many providers with enhanced autonomies' (*ibid*, p.89). What this amounts to is a redrawing of the public-private divide and which is evidenced in:

...the creation of executive agencies (and boards, councils and trusts), the establishing of private–public partnerships (of many different kinds), contracting out state services to private providers, the use of think tanks, consultants and knowledge companies for policy research and evaluation, philanthropic activity and sponsorship to fund educational programmes and innovations, the involvement of the voluntary sector (charities, NGOs, trusts, foundations, etc.) in service provision, the 'incorporation' of public sector organisations, and the use of social entrepreneurs to address intractable and 'wicked' social problems – sometimes in complex combinations. In other words, tasks and services previously undertaken by the state and public sector organisations are now being done by various 'others' in various kinds of relationships among themselves and to various parts of the state (*ibid*, p.97).

These changes Ball refers to as the 'liberalising' (*ibid*, p.94) of education and are indicative of the state/market tensivity referred to earlier. The current phase of education reform he calls post-neo-liberal, and follows on from New Labour's (1997-2010) approach in which 'the state became the powerhouse of public sector reform and a 'transformer' and 'market-maker.' New Labour were 'doing' many Conservative policies but doing them differently. The Coalition is now 'doing' many of the reforms set in train by

New Labour - such as academies - but 'doing' them differently. Whereas New Labour reformed education through regulation and centralised programmes, the Conservative coalition is reducing and stripping out regulation, giving schools and head teachers more autonomy and allowing greater diversity and emphasising consumerism (*ibid*, p.93). Central to this process is the emphasis on choice such that Le Grand suggests that, for the libertarian, choice in a quasi-market is a good, in and of itself (Le Grand 2011, p.82).

However, in applying the same critique to education markets as is applied to state monopoly education, it is Ball's (1993) contention that the issues defining the purposes of state education, in other words education as the public good, are obscured in the debate about parental choice. The market solution that choice will satisfy both individual and national interest is little more than 'an act of faith' (*ibid*, p.15). The underlying assumption that individual and national 'needs' and individual wants are the same thing is unsupported. Market, and Big Society solutions to the existence of public goods, within market economies, albeit a quasi-market, are at best no more capable of addressing this market 'inadequacy' than the use of a powerful state to protect and secure public goods such as education. What is at stake is social democracy in a system that privileges wealth and knowledge as the means of positional power.

Summary

The Big Society and the problem of political neoliberalism

It was Stephen Ball (1995) who, commenting on a previous Conservative administration, remarked that neo-conservatism had been undermined by neoliberal capitalism. As shown above, this observation holds true in the current context. The ideals of the compassionate conservatism of Jesse Norman and the Red Toryism of Phillip Blond, those contemporary iterations of traditional conservatism, are being 'crowded out' and undermined by an aggressive neoliberal project. In recognising that society is built upon social networks, and

the construction of a diversity of institutions that protect and perpetuate the ideals and values of that society, both compassionate conservatism and Red Toryism also acknowledge that some of these institutions should offer a buffer between the state and the individual. However, as the boundaries of the state become more permeable or 'redrawn' under the influence of political neoliberalism, the ability to mediate between the individual and the state is compromised. The voice of the individual is overpowered by the will of a global financial system operating through imperfect markets or oligopolies. In order to address this the Big Society turns attention away from the root problem to the potential power for maintaining welfare and social order, latent within local communities: the informal and formal social networks and groupings represented by charitable, private and voluntary organisations and institutions. In other words, the Big Society actively shifts responsibility and accountability from the state to the individual as a 'right of choice'. By removing the bureaucratic hand of big government, civic society is to find local solutions to local, and national problems; those destabilising effects of widening inequalities and the breakdown of trust. However, 'local problems' are rarely isolated, situational and generated by mere local practices, nor can they be addressed simply by local panaceas or technical solutions. Rather, they are indicative of far greater issues that originate from the practice of political neoliberalism. Housing, employment, issues of social class, educational inequality and institutional failings are all part of the same neoliberal Gordian knot. It is in this way that the Big Society agenda, which set out to ameliorate these negative effects in public and social policy, including education policy, itself falls sway to neoliberal hegemony.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

How should the notion of the Big Society be appraised? This thesis set out to explore what is meant by the Big Society and to establish how far the concept is encapsulated in the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government education policy under the aegis of Secretary of State Michael Gove.

Chapter 1 indicated that the Big Society was not a new concept but drew on a wealth of traditions and ideas about strengthening communities, civic action and co-ownership of public services, all of which pointed to a redistribution of state power from the centre to communities at the periphery. Notions of community proved to be a strong feature of its long ideological history, readily adopted as the organizing tool in public policy discourse by governments of various political persuasions, first as a means of enhancing social capital and second as a way of making public service provision more sustainable. However, the epigrammatic nature of the 'Big Society', presented as the antithesis of 'big government', turns attention away from the central issues for government, namely the governance of public service provision and maintaining social order.

Overall there was little consensus on what a Big Society might mean. Chapter 2 outlined two very different accounts from key exponents of the Big Society. Whereas Norman focused on the potential of aligning liberal and conservative political tradition and thought, Blond sought to address what he viewed as the failure of political liberalism post 1960. Both grounded their arguments in various historical iterations of liberalism and conservatism ranging from Edmund Burke to Michael Oakeshott, Benjamin Disraeli to John Milbank. The evident lack of coherence in conservative thinking led to a programme of education reform, outlined in Chapter 3 that is similarly devoid of internal rationality or consistency. This can partly be explained by theories of policy construction such as Levi Strauss's notion of *Bricolage* or Hall's views on the agency of political ideas and discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

Analysis of the 2011 Education Act, however, brings into sharp relief the tensions inherent in a policy built on neo-conservative principles that are essentially

neoliberal: 'the market wherever possible, the state where necessary (Crouch 2012:26). If, as the Big Society asserts, the institutions of civil society, including the education system, serve as a buffer between the state and the individual, then the ability to mediate between state and society has been undermined by an aggressive, neoliberal project. On the surface, promoting an active and participatory civil society may look like a means of ameliorating the big hand of government, but in reality this has less to do with enhancing social capital and more to do with shifting responsibility and accountability for welfare and social order away from the state. In other words, it is unlikely that Putman's notion of social capital forms the sociological basis of the Big Society as evidenced through education policy 2010-2014. Rather, acquiescence to the power of the global market, social class and the vested interests of [powerful] individuals or corporate business serves to limit the agency of civil institutions and reduce them to an instrument of state. It is the state that coerces social institutions, philanthropies and business to act on its behalf. Certain schools, for example, have been forced to convert to Academy status or applications for Free Schools turned down whilst the wishes of local communities have been overruled. Rather than devolve or redistribute state power, this has continued to centralize. The powers accrued to the Secretary of State for Education under the 2011 Act serves as an example here. In other words, power is reorganized in accordance with the wishes of government not to meet the needs, aspirations or wishes of society.

In the final analysis, there was no consensus on what a Big Society meant and in consequence no overall acceptance of the concept as a policy initiative. In turn this meant that there was to be no coherent policy across government departments, including that of education. It has left unanswered questions about the purpose of a state system of education. In continuing the centralisation of state power in relation to civil society, the Big Society may, in reality, have advanced rather than stemmed the tide of neoliberal hegemony.

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